

T H E
ENGLISH PREACHER.

VOL. V.



T H E
ENGLISH PREACHER:

O R,

S E R M O N S

ON THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS OF
RELIGION AND MORALITY,

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T H E
C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

By ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON.

Objections against a Religious Life
answered. Page 1.

JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

*If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord,
choose you this day whom you will serve.*

S E R M O N II.

By the Rev. JOHN BALGUY, M. A.

The Divine Government a certain and
joyful Truth. P. 21.

PSALM XCVII. 1.

The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.

S E R-

vi THE CONTENTS.

SERMON III.

By the Rev. JOHN ROGERS, D.D.

The Importance of forming Virtuous
Connections. Page 41.

PSALM CXIX. 63.

*I am a companion of all them that fear thee,
and of them that keep thy precepts.*

SERMON IV.

By the Rev. JEREMIAH SEED, M. A.

Domestic Love and Union recommended
and enforced. P. 57.

PROVERBS XV. 17.

*Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is,
than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.*

SERMON V.

By the Rev. JEREMIAH SEED, M. A.

The Pursuit of Wisdom recommended
to Youth. P. 75.

PROVERBS XVIII. 1.

*Through desire, a man having separated
himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with
wisdom.* SER-

THE CONTENTS. vii

SERMON VI.

By the Rev. PHILIP DODDRIDGE, D. D.

On Persecution. Page 95.

LUKE IX. 55, 56.

But he turned, and rebuked them; and ye know not what manner of spirit he is of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

SERMON VII.

By the Rev. JOHN HOLLAND.

The Nature and Excellence of Charity.
P. 121.

I CORINTHIANS XIII. 1.

Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

SERMON VIII.

By the Rev. JAMES FOSTER, D. D.

On the Frailty of Human Nature. P. 143.

ISAIAH XL. 6.

All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.

SER-

viii THE CONTENTS.

SERMON IX.

By the Rev. BENJAMIN IBBOT, D. D.

On Self-Government. Page 163.

PROVERBS XVI. 32.

*He that is slow to anger, is better than
the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit,
than he that taketh a city.*

SERMON X.

By the Rev. SAMUEL CLARKE, D. D.

Uprightness a Man's greatest Security.
P. 185.

PROVERBS X. 9.

He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.

SERMON XI.

By the Rev. SAMUEL SQUIRE, D. D.

On the true Use of Riches. P. 209.

MATTHEW VI. 19, 20.

*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon
earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt,
and where thieves break through and steal:
But lay up for yourselves treasures in
heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth
corrupt, and where thieves do not break
through nor steal.*

SER-

THE CONTENTS. ix

S E R M O N XII.

By the Rev. JOHN BALGUY, M. A.

On our Saviour's Sufferings and Death.

Page 229.

HEBREWS XII. 2.

*Who, for the joy that was set before him,
endured the cross, despising the shame.*

S E R M O N XIII.

By the Rev. JOHN ADAMS, D. D.

On rash Judgment and Censure. P. 247.

ACTS XXVIII. 5, 6.

*He shook off the beast into the fire, and felt
no harm. Howbeit, they looked when he
should have swollen, or fallen down dead
suddenly; but after they had looked a great
while, and saw no harm come to him, they
changed their minds, and said, that he
was a god.*

S E R M O N XIV.

By the Rev. GEORGE OSBORNE.

Subjection to Civil Authority explained
and enforced. P. 267.

TITUS III. I.

*Put them in mind to be subject to princi-
palities, and powers, to obey magistrates.*

S E R-

X THE CONTENTS.

SERMON XV.

By the Rev. ROBERT MACKEWEN, M. A.

A Crown of Righteousness the Reward
of Christian Fortitude. Page 287.

2 TIMOTHY IV. 7, 8.

*I have fought a good fight, I have finished
my course, I have kept the faith. Hence-
forth there is laid up for me a crown of
righteousness, which the Lord, the right-
eous Judge, shall give me at that day :
And not to me only, but unto all them
also that love his appearing.*

E R R A T A.

Page 63, line 3, for *fold* read *solid*.

118, 17, for *impartially* read *impartiality*.

137, 25, for *may* read *many*.

150, 21, for *of* read *not*.

151, 13, *dele* not.

S E R M O N I.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST A RELIGIOUS LIFE ANSWERED.

JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

*If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord,
chuse you this day whom you will serve.*

THESE words are the last counsel and advice which Joshua gave to the people of Israel, after he had safely conducted them into the land of Canaan. And that he might the more effectually

VOL. V. **B** persuade

persuade them to continue stedfast in the worship of the true God, by an eloquent kind of insinuation he doth as it were once more set them at liberty, and leave them to their own choice; "If it seem
"evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse
"you this day whom you will serve."

The plain sense of which words may be resolved into this proposition; that notwithstanding all the prejudices and objections against religion, yet it hath those real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any impartial and considerate man's choice; "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord;" intimating that to some persons, and upon some accounts, it may seem so: but when the matter is thoroughly examined, the resolution and choice cannot be difficult, nor require any long deliberation, "Chuse you this day whom you will serve."

The principal objection which men have raised against the practice of religion is this, That the laws of religion thwart the natural inclinations of men, and lay too great a restraint upon human nature, intrenching too much upon the pleasures
and

and liberty of it: so that God seems to have set our nature and duty at variance; to have given us appetites and inclinations one way, and laws another: which, if it were true, must needs render the practice of religion very grievous and uneasy.

But, to solve this difficulty, it may be observed that God did not design to create man in the full possession of happiness at first, but to train him up to it by the trial of his obedience. Now there could be no trial of our obedience without some difficulty in our duty: either by reason of powerful temptations from without, or of perverse inclinations from within.

The hardest contest between man's inclination and duty, is in those who have wilfully contracted vicious habits, and by that means rendered their duty much more difficult to themselves. But though to those who have wilfully contracted vicious habits, a religious and virtuous course of life be very difficult, yet the main difficulty lies in our first entrance upon it; and when that is over, the ways of goodness are as easy as it is fit any thing should be that is so excellent,

lent, and that hath the encouragement of so glorious a reward. Custom will reconcile men almost to any thing; but there are those charms in the ways of wisdom and virtue, that a little acquaintance and conversation with them will soon make them more delightful than any other course. And who will grudge any pains and trouble to bring himself into so safe and happy a condition? After we have tried both courses, of religion and profaneness, of virtue and vice, we shall certainly find, that nothing is so wise, so easy, and so comfortable as to be virtuous and good, and always to do that which we are inwardly convinced we ought to do. Nor would I desire more of any man in this matter, than to follow the sober convictions of his own mind, and to do that which upon the most serious consideration at all times, in prosperity and affliction, in sickness and health, in the time of life, and at the hour of death, he judgeth wisest and safest for him to do.

There was, I confess, some pretence for complaining of the hardships of religion under the Jewish dispensation, which by the

the multitude of its positive institutions and external observances, must needs have been very burthensome. And the same objection lies against the church of Rome, who (as they have handled christianity) by the unreasonable number of their needless and senseless ceremonies, have made the yoke of Christ heavier than that of Moses, and the gospel a more carnal commandment than the law. So that Christianity is lost among them in the trappings and accoutrements of it; with which, instead of adorning religion, they have strangely disguised it; and have quite stifled it in the croud of external riches and ceremonies.

But the pure Christian religion, as it was delivered by our Saviour, hath scarcely any thing in it that is positive; except the two sacraments, which are not of a burdensome nature, but very much for our comfort and advantage, because they convey and confirm to us the great blessings and privileges of our religion. In other things, Christianity hath scarcely imposed any other laws upon us but what are enacted in our nature, or are agreeable to the prime and fundamental

6 *Objections against a Religious*

laws of it; nothing but what every man's reason either dictates to him to be necessary, or approves as highly fit and reasonable.

But we most grossly mistake the nature of pleasure and liberty, if we promise them to ourselves in any wicked course. For, upon due search and trial it will be found, that true pleasure, and perfect freedom, are no where to be found but in the practice of virtue, and in the service of God. The laws of religion do not abridge us of any pleasure that a wise man can desire, and safely enjoy, I mean without a greater evil and trouble consequent upon it. The pleasure of commanding our appetites, and governing our passions, by the rules of reason (which are the laws of God) is infinitely to be preferred before any sensual pleasure whatever: because it is the pleasure of wisdom and discretion; and gives us the satisfaction of having done that which is best and fittest for reasonable creatures to do. Who would not rather chuse to govern himself as Scipio did, amidst all the temptations and opportunities of sensual pleasures which his power and victories

ries presented to him, than to indulge himself in all the delights of sense?

Nothing is more certain in reason and experience, than that every inordinate appetite and affection is a punishment to itself; and is perpetually crossing its own pleasure, and defeating its own satisfaction, by over-shooting the mark it aims at. For instance, intemperance in eating and drinking, instead of delighting and satisfying nature, only serves to load and cloy it; and instead of quenching a natural thirst, which it is extremely pleasant to do, creates an unnatural one, which is troublesome and endless. And the pleasure of revenge, as soon as it is executed turns into grief and pity, guilt and remorse, and a thousand melancholy wishes that we had restrained ourselves from so unreasonable an act. God and reason have set us no other bounds concerning the use of sensual pleasures, but that we take care not to be injurious to ourselves, or others, in the kind or degree of them. It is very visible, that all sensual excess is naturally attended with a double inconvenience: as it goes beyond the limits of nature, it begets bodily pains and dis-

8 *Objections against a Religious*

eases: as it transgresseth the rules of reason and religion, it creates guilt and remorse in the mind. And these are, beyond comparison, the two greatest evils in this world; a diseased body, and a discontented mind. In this I am sure I speak to the inward feeling and experience of men; and say nothing but what every vicious man finds, and hath a more lively sense of, than is to be expressed by words.

After all that can be said, there is no pleasure comparable to that of innocency and freedom from the stings of a guilty conscience; this is a pure and spiritual pleasure, much above any sensual delight. Among all the delights of sense, that of health (which is the natural consequence of a sober, chaste, and regular life) is a pleasure far beyond that of any vice: for it is the life of life; and that which gives a grateful relish to all our other enjoyments. It is not indeed so violent and transporting a pleasure; but it is pure and even, and lasting, and hath no guilt and regret, no sorrow and trouble attending it: which is a worm that infallibly breeds in all vicious and
unlawful

unlawful pleasures, and makes them bitterness in the end.

All the ways of sin are so beset with difficulties on every side, there are so many unanswerable objections against vice, from the unreasonableness and deformity of it, from the remorse that attends it, from the misery that follows it, that none but the rash and inconsiderate can obtain leave of themselves to commit it. It is the daughter of inadvertency, blindness and folly; the mother of guilt, repentance and woe. There is no pleasure that will hold out and abide with us to the last, but that of innocency and well-doing. All sin is folly; and "all folly soon grows sick and weary of itself." The pleasure of it is slight and superficial, but the trouble and remorse of it pierceth our very hearts.

As to the other part of the objection, That religion restrains us of our liberty: the contrary is evidently true, that vice is the greatest slavery. For he is truly a slave, who is not at liberty to follow his own judgment, and to do those things which he is inwardly convinced it is best for him to do; but is

subject to the unreasonable commands, and the tyrannical power and violence of his lusts and passions: so that he is not master of himself, but other lords have dominion over him, and he is perfectly at their command. One vice or passion bids him go, and he goes; another come, and he comes; and a third do this, and he doth it. The man is at perpetual variance with his own mind, and continually committing the things which he condemns in himself. And it is all one, whether a man be subject to the will and humour of another person, or to his own lusts and passions. Only this of the two is the worse; because the tyrant is at home, and always ready at hand to domineer over him; he is within him, and so much the harder to be vanquished and overcome.

But the service of God, and obedience to his laws, is perfect liberty. Because the law of God requires nothing of us, but what is recommended to us by our own reason, and from the benefit and advantage of doing it; nothing but what is much more for our own interest to do it, than it can be for God's to command it.

it. If in some things God exacts obedience of us more indispensably, and under severer penalties, it is because those things are in their nature more necessary to our felicity. And how could God possibly have dealt more graciously and kindly with us, than to oblige us most strictly to do that which is most evidently for our good; and to make such laws for us, as, if we live in obedience to them, will infallibly make us happy? So that, taking all things into consideration, the interest of our bodies and souls, of the present and the future, of this world and the other, religion is the most reasonable and wise, the most comfortable and compendious course that any man can take in order to his own happiness.

The consideration of this ought to be a great endearment of our duty to us, and a most prevalent argument with us to yield a ready and chearful obedience to the laws of God; which are in truth so many acts of grace and favour to mankind, the real privileges of our nature, and the proper means and causes of our happiness; and restrain us from nothing but doing mischief to ourselves, and making ourselves miserable.

Instead of opposing religion therefore, upon pretence of the unreasonable restraints of it, we ought to thank God heartily, that he hath laid so strict an obligation upon us to regard and pursue our true interest; and hath been pleased to take so much care of us, as to set bounds to our loose and wild appetites by our duty: that, in giving us rules to live by, he hath not complied with our inconsiderate and foolish inclinations, to our real harm and prejudice: but hath made those things necessary for us to do, which in all respects are best for us; and which, if we were quite left to our own liberty, ought in all reason to be our free and first choice: that he hath made the folly and inconvenience of sin so grossly palpable, that every man may see it beforehand, who will but consider, and at the beginning of a bad course look to the end of it.

Now, by all that hath been said upon this argument, I hope we are satisfied that religion is no such intolerable yoke as hath been imagined; and that upon a due and full consideration of things, it cannot "seem evil" unto any of us "to serve the Lord:"

nay,

nay, on the contrary, that it is absolutely necessary, both to our present peace and future felicity: that a religious and virtuous life is not only upon all accounts the most prudent, but after we are entered upon it, and accustomed to it, the most pleasant course that any man can take; and, however inconsiderate men may complain of the restraints of religion, that it is not more our duty, than it is our privilege and happiness.

I cannot think, that upon sober consideration any man could see reason to thank God to be released from any of his laws, or to have had the contrary to them enjoined. Let us suppose that the laws of God had been just the reverse of what they now are; that they had commanded us, under severe penalties, to deal falsely and fraudulently with our neighbours, to demean ourselves ungratefully to our best friends and benefactors, and to pursue sensual pleasures to the endangering of our health and life: how should we have complained of the unreasonableness of these laws, and have murmured at the slavery of such intolerable impositions! And yet, now that God
hath

hath commanded us the contrary, things every way agreeable to our reason and interest, we are not satisfied. What will content us? As our Saviour expostulates in a similar case; "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children playing in the market-place, and calling unto their companions, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned, and ye have not lamented." This is perfectly childish, to be pleased with nothing; neither to like this, nor the contrary. We are not contented with the laws of God as they are, and yet the contrary to them we should have esteemed the greatest grievance in the world.

If this be true, that the laws of God, how contrary soever to our vicious inclinations, are really calculated for our benefit, it would almost be an affront to wise and considerate men to importune them to their interest; and with great earnestness to persuade them to that which in all respects is so visibly for their advantage. "Chuse you" therefore "this day whom you will serve;" God, or your vices. And take up

up a speedy resolution in a matter of so great and pressing a concern ; chuse you "this day."

Where there is great hazard in the doing of a thing, it is good to deliberate long before we undertake it ; but where the thing is not only safe but beneficial, and not only beneficial but highly necessary ; when our life and happiness depend upon it, and all the danger lies in the delay of it ; we cannot be too sudden in our resolution, nor too speedy in the execution of it. That which is evidently safe, needs no deliberation ; and that which is absolutely necessary will admit of none.

Therefore resolve upon it immediately ; "to day, whilst it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the "deceitfulness of sin." In the days of your youth and health ; for "that is the acceptable time," that is "the day of salvation ; before "the evil day comes," and you be driven to it by the terrible apprehension and approach of death, when men fly to God only for fear of his wrath.

Men's words then come from the bottom

tom of their hearts; the mask is taken off, and things then appear as in truth they are. But then perhaps it may be too late to make this choice: nay, then it can hardly be choice, but necessity. Men do not then chuse to serve the Lord, but they are urged and forced to it by their fears. They have served their vices all their life long, and now they would fain serve themselves of God at the hour of death. They have done what they can, by their insolent contempt and defiance of the Almighty, to make themselves miserable; and now they can stand out no longer against him, they are contented at last to be beholding to him to make them happy. The mercies of God are great and boundless; but yet methinks it is too great a presumption in all reason, for men to design before-hand to make the mercy of God the sanctuary and retreat of a sinful life.

To conclude; If safety, or pleasure, or liberty, or wisdom, or virtue, or even happiness itself have any temptation in them, religion hath all these allurements. What Tully says of philosophy, is much more

more true of the Christian religion, the wisdom and philosophy which is from above; "We can never praise it enough, "since whoever lives according to the "rules of it, may pass the whole age of "his life" (I may add, his whole duration, this life and the other) "without trouble."

Philosophy hath given us several plausible rules for the attaining of peace and tranquillity of mind, but they fall very much short of bringing men to it. The very best of them fail us upon the greatest occasions. But the Christian religion hath effectually done all that which philosophy pretended to, and aimed at. The precepts and promises of the Holy Scriptures are every way sufficient for our comfort, and for our instruction in righteousness: to correct all the errors, and to bear us up under all the evils and adversities of human life; especially that holy and heavenly doctrine which is contained in the admirable Sermons of our Saviour.

This is the advantage of the Christian religion sincerely believed and practised, that it gives perfect rest and tranquillity to the mind of man: it frees us from the
guilt

guilt of an evil conscience, from the power of our vicious passions, from the slavish fear of death, and from punishment in another world. It builds our comfort upon a rock, which will abide all storms, will remain unshaken in every condition, and will last and hold out for ever. "He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them," (saith our Lord) "I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock."

In short, Religion makes the life of man a wise design, regular and constant to itself; because it unites all our resolutions and actions in one great end: whereas without religion the life of man is a wild and inconsistent thing, without any certain scope and design. The vicious man lives at random, and acts by chance: for he that walks by no rule, can carry on no settled and steady design. It is melancholy to observe what a burden time is to such men, and how solicitous they are to devise ways not to spend it, but to squander it away. For their great grievance is consideration, and to be obliged to be intent upon any thing that is serious. They hurry from one vanity and folly to another; and are beholding

holding to every vain man, and to every trifling occasion, that can but help to take time off their hands. Wretched and inconsiderate men! who have so great a work before them, the happiness of eternity to take care of, and provide for, and yet are at a loss how to employ their time! Irreligion and vice makes life an extravagant and unnatural thing, because it perverts and overthrows the natural course and order of things. For instance; according to nature men labour to get an estate, to free themselves from temptations to rapine and injury; and that they may have wherewith to supply their own wants, and relieve the wants of others. But now the covetous man heaps up riches, not to enjoy them, but to have them; starves himself in the midst of plenty; most unnaturally cheats and robs himself of that which is his own; and makes a hard shift to be as poor and miserable with a great estate, as any man can be without it. According to the design of nature, men should eat and drink that they may live; but the voluptuous man only lives that he may eat and drink. Nature in all sensual enjoyments designs pleasure, which
may

may certainly be had within the limits of virtue: but vice rashly pursues pleasure into the enemies' quarters; and never stops, till the sinner be surrounded and seized upon by pain and torment.

So that take away God and religion, and men live to no purpose; without proposing any worthy and valuable end of life to themselves. Whereas the fear of God, and the care of our immortal souls, fixeth us upon one great design, to which our whole life, and all the actions of it are ultimately referred. When we acknowledge God as the Author of our being, as our Sovereign, and our Judge, our end and our happiness is then fixed; and we can have but one reasonable design, and that is, by endeavouring to please God, to gain his favour and protection in this world, and to dwell with him for ever in the other; "in whose presence is fulness of joy, "and at whose right hand are pleasures "for evermore." To Him be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever! Amen.

S E R M O N II.

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT A
CERTAIN AND JOYFUL TRUTH.

PSALM xcvi. I.

The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.

TO acknowledge a Deity, and yet suppose, as some of the heathen philosophers pretended to do, that he is altogether unconcerned either in the creation or government of the world, is owning him in words, and disowning him in reality. In like manner, to confess that
therein

"God made the world, and all things therein," and at the same time deny his care and providence over it; is, in effect, maintaining a God without divine attributes. It is maintaining inconsistent opinions, and separating things essentially united. As sure as there is a God, so sure is it that he is supremely wise, and infinitely good. But to create the world, and then leave it to itself, and all the confusion consequent thereupon, is a conduct impossible to be reconciled with either of those perfections. If our clearest ideas are to be trusted, there would be no wisdom, no goodness at all in such a procedure. For whatever ends might be proposed in the production of such a forlorn world, they could not possibly be answered. Neither the Creator's glory, nor his creatures' happiness, could be in any measure accomplished without a Providence. And as to any other intentions, we are not able to frame any conception of them. However, they must needs likewise be ineffectual, and frustrate on the same supposition.

But let us examine the grounds of this important doctrine somewhat more particularly and distinctly. Strictly speaking,
the

the creation necessarily requires the continued influence and perpetual support of its Creator. Both reason and revelation assure us, that "by him all things consist:" that "he preserveth and upholdeth all things by the word of his power:" that "in his hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind:" and that "in him we live, move, and have our being." In this respect therefore, God's Providence not only stands on firm foundations, and sure evidence, but appears absolutely necessary; since the world could no more continue without his aid, than it could exist without it at first. The great machine of the universe, wonderfully framed and fitted as it is, yet cannot go on of itself; but unavoidably depends on its Almighty Author, and naturally requires his concurrence, to keep it not only in order, but in being. Nor does this argue any defect in his workmanship; because an independent system of creatures is not only absurd, but utterly impossible.

Nevertheless, it is not so much this, as another branch of Divine Providence, that we are chiefly to understand by the
decla-

declaration in the text. - God superintends indeed the whole; and governs the natural, as well as the moral world. - All creatures are subject to his power and rule, whether they be animate, or inanimate: but when his reign, his dominion, his kingdom are spoken of; we are primarily, if not peculiarly, to understand his government of moral agents, and rational subjects. As these are his noblest productions, and stand at the head of the creation, they must needs be the principal objects of his care and providence. To direct mere matter, and produce out of it so much order and convenience, so much beauty and variety, so much symmetry and proportion, requires doubtless great power and wisdom; but to preside over the intellectual system, to rule not only the "children of men, and the kingdom of the earth," but all angels, and authorities, and heavenly powers; such an administration as this is divine in the highest sense; and such a kingdom is most worthy of him, whose power is boundless, "and his understanding infinite," and who upon that account is "the only potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords."

But

But to proceed; this kingdom of God, this government of the moral world, being in a more especial manner the doctrine of the text, and indeed most expressly taught throughout the whole scriptures, need not be more particularly proved from thence. Let us therefore briefly and impartially enquire how it appears to the reason of our own minds. The question then is, if it can be called so, whether God's creatures, his intelligent creatures, be under his care, protection, and government; or whether they are wholly abandoned to their own management, and given up to their own guidance. If they be left to themselves, and the government of the world is refused by the maker of it; no other account can possibly be given of the thing, but that he either wanted power or inclination: either was not able to execute this great charge, or not willing. And if both these suppositions are evidently false and groundless, the consequence must be the truth of the proposition set forth in my text.

That God neither did, nor could want power to govern the world, is manifest even to demonstration. For not to mention that omnipotence is an essential at-

tribute of the divine nature, most certain it is, that he who was able to create the world, must much more be able to direct and govern it; creation implying and requiring the highest of all power. He who could raise the universe from nothing, and fix it originally in the most exact order, cannot possibly fail of full power to preserve and regulate it. "He who planted the ear," as the Psalmist observes "shall he not hear; he who formed the eye, shall he not see?" Can any thing escape his perception who inhabits eternity and infinity; who vitally exists every where, and can be absent no where? And as nothing is unknown to him, so nothing is impossible with him. Nothing can resist his will, or make the least opposition to his decrees. Omnipotence knows no difficulties; but with the greatest ease accomplishes whatever it pleases, and subdueth all things unto itself. The whole creation is full of this truth; and every object we meet with, proclaims the incomprehensible power and majesty of him that made it.

Since then it cannot be supposed, without the greatest contradiction to his nature,

nature, that God should be unable to govern the world; we are next to consider whether he could be supposed unwilling. And the resolution of this point will readily be found. For whatever is most agreeable to perfect wisdom and goodness, must in this case be fact. Most infallibly God is ever willing to determine, and do, what is wisest and best. Can then any man think it agreeable to perfect wisdom, that God should be so regardless of the works of his hands, as immediately to lay aside all care and concern about them? That he should make the world, and then forsake it as soon as he had made it? That he should furnish and fit it up in the noblest manner, and replenish it with an endless variety of inhabitants: that he should produce innumerable orders of beings, and ranks of creatures, many of them formed after his own divine image, and qualified for the knowledge and imitation of himself; and when he had so done, relinquish the whole, and give every thing up to chance and confusion? How can such a conduct as this be ascribed to any wise agent? And much less to infinite wisdom. For as we before observed,

whatever ends or intentions the Creator proposed, they could never be accomplished without his direction and concurrence. But perhaps it may be urged, that the world was framed in such wonderful order and perfection, as to stand in no further need of the Creator's superintendence; and that his rational creatures were made capable of guiding themselves, and governing those beneath them; and that thereby the order of the world might be maintained without the divine interposition. The answer to which is, that every part of this pretence is groundless. It is demonstrable that the very material world cannot be kept in order by second causes, but continually stands in need of the Creator's influence, as might be shewn at large. And much less could the order and harmony of the intellectual world be maintained without the divine administration. It is true, men are endued with reason, and angels with more; but yet both men and angels being endued also with liberty, and imperfect, might act against the light of their own minds, and fall into disorder; and accordingly both have actually done so. On which account, were it not for God's Providence

dence and government, it is evident that the moral world, as well as the natural, would become a mere chaos, and fall into inextricable confusion. Is it not necessary for the public security, that evil men and evil angels be curbed and restrained? Is it not necessary that innocence be protected and virtue encouraged? That guilt be exposed and prosecuted, and vice and villany checked and punished? And how should any thing of this kind be effectually done, if God did not sit at the helm, direct all affairs and dispose of all events, according to the rules of righteousness and truth. But in order to discover the weakness of this plea, we need only take notice how it would hold in any human establishments. Is any thing to be done without rulers and governors? And supposing a set of laws, of the best laws, already made; will they execute themselves? It is very true that men have reason to direct them, and laws of various kinds; but it is likewise as true, that many men have wild humours, fierce desires, and furious passions, which frequently prompt them to act in defiance both of law and reason. On which account, and for the enforcement and sup-

port of both, an executive power is, and ever will be, absolutely necessary in all states and communities. And must not this observation hold much stronger in respect of the whole creation? If the several societies among men require rulers and governors, and cannot subsist without them; what can we think of the universe itself? Must not the whole stand in greater need of government, than any part? Most certain therefore it is, that the all-wise Creator would never produce such a great and glorious system, and then leave it in a state of anarchy; this being utterly inconsistent with all the rules of wisdom that we are capable of discovering.

Nor is it less repugnant to his righteousness and goodness. As perfectly good, he must propose the welfare of his creatures; and in order thereto, he would not fail to direct and govern them. For as we have already seen, if he had left them to themselves, they could neither expect happiness, security, nor quiet. Again, his guidance and government of the world clearly follows from the rectitude of his nature. It is impossible that he should be ignorant of the behaviour
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of his creatures. He must see at all times whether they do well or ill, whether they act virtuously or wickedly; and, as a righteous Being, cannot fail to judge them accordingly. If God did not govern the world, no sufficient distinction could be maintained between virtue and vice; nay, in many cases it would happen, that the latter prospered more than the former. Vice would often succeed and flourish, and virtue fall into extreme distress. Now this, I say, is what a righteous God cannot possibly suffer; not finally I mean. He may suffer it for a season, and in fact we find that he actually does so; insomuch that his government of the world has been sometimes called in question on this very account. But certainly without just grounds. The irregular distribution of good and evil in this life is indeed a clear proof of a future state, wherein every thing will be punctually adjusted and set to rights; but it proves nothing at all against the doctrine we are considering. As sure as God is righteous and holy, vice will suffer, and virtue will prevail and prosper in due time. But no reason can be shewn why the present time must needs be the

proper time: so far from it, that good reasons may be given for the contrary. However, since it must be done sooner or later, either in this life or in the next; since it necessarily follows from the perfections of the divine nature, that the righteous will be protected and encouraged, and the wicked punished; and since moreover this can only be done by the great searcher of hearts; the consequence must be that the world is governed by him.

Thus then it appears from the plain principles of reason that "the Lord is King," as we read in the text: and the next thing to be considered is the inference which follows, "the earth may be glad thereof." And in truth it is one of the most just and natural inferences in the world. For what is there in all the compass of nature, or even within the reach of human imagination, that can administer to the minds of men so much true comfort, contentment, and complacency, as this single fact is capable of doing? The most desirable, and most joyful truth, that can either be uttered, or conceived, is, that the Lord is King, and that his dominion endureth throughout
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all ages. If we have any thought, any reflection, must we not needs be glad to find ourselves in the hands, and under the protection of that governor, whose great and constant aim is the safety and felicity of all his subjects? Who enjoins us no other laws than those of truth and righteousness; which at the same time are the rule, the inviolable rule of his own actions: a governor who never wants power to do whatever he pleases, and who never pleases to do any thing but what is just and fit; "who is gracious, merciful, and long-suffering; full of gentleness, goodness, and loving-kindness; and whose tender mercies are over all his works:" in short, a governor, who is so far from dealing with his creatures by any capricious rules, or arbitrary measures; that his will is the very law of kindness: all his precepts are favours and blessings, and his very judgments, benefactions.

If we reflect on our condition and circumstances in the present world, we cannot but find cause to rejoice, on all accounts, that we are under the tuition and administration of a supreme Being. Considering our wants and infirmities, our

frailties and follies, and how unable we are to help ourselves; our whole life ought to be looked upon as a state of minority: even in our best and wisest period, to lose the guardianship of Heaven would be certain ruin. This is our grand support and security; and comparatively speaking, the sole foundation of our hope and trust. We are beset on all sides, and threatened from all quarters; are compassed about with a great variety of dangers and distresses. Many difficulties we meet with that we cannot conquer; many obstacles that we cannot surmount. Numberless evils hang over our heads, ready to fall upon us, and crush us, every instant. When misfortunes are at a distance, very often we cannot foresee them; and when we do foresee them, we often know not how to prevent them. And when they arrive, and are actually upon us, we frequently are at a loss how to redress them, or where to find a remedy. We are liable to so many disasters without, and so many disorders within; are so much exposed to the fury of the elements, and the greater fury of lawless and violent men; find so many snares and temptations planted

ed in our way ; have so many hazards and hardships to encounter ; such a number of infirmities, corruptions, and evil habits to subdue in ourselves ; and such force, fraud, and falshood to withstand in others ; that were we deprived of the protection of divine providence, we should be left utterly desolate, and sink down into the depths of sin and sorrow, and misery, as naturally “ as the sparks fly upwards.” But, on the other hand, if we consider ourselves as the objects of God’s care and concern ; that he is our ruler, our defender, our guide ; and “ we his people, and the sheep of his pasture ;” the scene changes, our condition brightens, and every thing appears with a new face. If we take care not to forfeit his favour, nothing need to dismay us ; for nothing can greatly hurt us. “ Though “ we walked through the valley of the “ shadow of death ; though the earth “ were removed, and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea ;” yet should we need to fear no evil ; for “ God “ is our refuge and strength, a present “ help,” and a sure support, in every trouble. Are we ignorant ? God is omniscient. Are we impotent ? He is

almighty. Are we apt to err, and prone to sin and folly? He is unerring wisdom, and spotless perfection. If he be on our side, who can be against us? If he protect us, what can touch us? Are we surrounded with dangers and calamities, troubles and trials; insomuch that our case appears desperate? He can extricate us with the greatest ease, and deliver us in a moment. For all nature is in his hand, and the whole creation under his controul. So far then we have just cause to rejoice, and be glad, that "the Lord is King."

But further; as there are many and great evils to be avoided, so there is a great variety of good to be sought after. Many wants and wishes we unavoidably have; many natural desires that require to be gratified; many craving appetites, and clamorous affections, that will be provided for, or continually torment us. Though we may subsist, yet we cannot be said to prosper, in a temporal sense, without a competent share of the comforts and conveniences of life. And had we nothing to depend on but our own endeavours; how little should we be able to make of them? We are apt to ascribe

cribe our successes to ourselves, and our own conduct; but doubtless in a great measure, very unjustly. They are chiefly owing to Divine Providence, and the succours of heaven; which conduct us, though unseen, and carry us on to prosperous events. Without these invisible aids, we should fail, and fall short, in almost every undertaking. No art, no skill, no diligence would avail, if Providence forsook us. It would only be "lost labour, that we hasted to rise early, and eat the bread of carefulness," if we had nothing to trust to but our own endeavours. Nor could any of our fellow-creatures ensure our success. For, comparatively speaking, "vain is the help of man," and precarious are all his purposes. But though human means be insufficient for the accomplishing of our ends, and the satisfying of our desires; yet what may we not expect from the interposition of heaven, and the wisdom and bounty of God's Providence? What good may we not hope for, if we be not wanting to ourselves? Whatever objects we set our hearts upon; whatever blessings we have in view; if they be fit for us, and we for them, we shall, in due time,

time, assuredly obtain them. And is not this consideration abundantly sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind? If any enjoyment be, in its consequences, mischievous to ourselves, we are false to our own interest if we desire it: and if it be detrimental to the public, we cannot innocently pretend to it. But under these limitations, our pursuits will not fail to be crowned with success. And what a happiness, what an honour is it to the children of men, to have, I will not say such a governor, but such a patron, such a benefactor, such a friend? A friend whose power is commensurate to his wisdom, and his goodness to both: a friend so kind and constant, as never to desert those who do not desert him: whose favours are inestimable, and his bounty inexhaustible: in a word, on whom we entirely depend for all the blessings of this life, and all our hopes in the next.

On the whole, to be under the divine rule and government is the most desirable circumstance in the world. To be directed by infinite wisdom, protected by infinite power, and befriended by infinite goodness, is the happiest situation, and
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the most glorious privilege that could belong either to men or angels.

What remains then, but that we cheerfully and thankfully submit to the authority of our heavenly ruler? That we pay a constant regard, and a willing obedience to his sacred laws; the violation of which is not only rebellion against God, but enmity against ourselves. By disobedience and impenitence, we turn the joy and gladness, spoken of in the text, into grief and terror. For most undoubtedly the "Judge of all the earth will do what is right." He will not fail to execute judgment on obstinate and incorrigible offenders. But if we obey his laws, and keep his commandments; if we sincerely endeavour to fulfil his will, and discharge our duty; we are sure of his acceptance, encouragement, and favour. Most gently shall we be treated, most graciously indulged, and most abundantly rewarded. "No good thing will he withhold from" his faithful subjects and servants. "Happy" then are all they "who are in such a case; yea blessed are the people, who have the Lord for their God."

S E R.

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will do so. What then shall we do?
To exert our powers of obedience and in-
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laws and keep his commandments, if
we patiently endure to fulfil his will,
and discharge our duty, we are sure of
his acceptance, encouragement, and re-
ward. Alas! how many of us are weary of
this weary service, and our souls
easily rewarded. "A good thing will
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and servants. "Happy" men are all
they "who are in such a day, yet shall
not be the people, who have the land
"for their God".

THE R.

S E R M O N III.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FORMING VIRTUOUS CONNECTIONS.

PSALM CXIX. 63.

*I am a companion of all them that fear
thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.*

THAT the temper, the sentiments,
the morality, and, in general, the
whole conduct and character of men are
influenced by the example and disposition
of those they converse with, is a reflection
which has long since passed into a pro-
verb,

verb, and been ranked among the standing maxims of human wisdom, in all ages and nations of the world. And mankind seem to act with conviction enough of this truth, in the care they take to deter those whose welfare they are concerned for from the company of such, the expence or infamy of whose vices may endanger their fortunes or reputation. But because the generality of men appear much less solicitous for the purely religious consequences of conversation, it is my present design to recommend to your imitation the conduct which the Psalmist here ascribes to himself; "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts."

By this example we are taught not to indulge ourselves in any confidence, or familiarity with impious and profane men, but especially not to communicate with them in their vices, nor to concur in any unjust, irreligious, or unmerciful action; and, as far as it is in our power, to avoid all intercourse with them, and as the apostle commands, "from such to withdraw ourselves." Not that we can imagine ourselves prohibited
all

all manner of conversation with wicked men. If we would absolutely decline their company, we must abandon human society, retire into a desert, and, as the apostle says, "go out of the world." What we are forbid, therefore, is receiving such persons into our confidence and intimacies, chusing their alliance for our friendships, or their company for the ordinary entertainments of conversation; these are acts of choice, and our own free election; and to these therefore it is reasonable the prohibition should extend. And even with regard to that unavoidable correspondence with wicked men, to which the business or accidents of the world may sometimes oblige us, we are certainly under this restraint, not to enter into any farther familiarity than the occasion requires, and to take care of our behaviour, lest we countenance the sin, while we caress the sinner.

To recommend a careful imitation of the example of David, in the instance referred to in the text, I would observe, that the choice of virtuous companions will be an evidence of our own virtue. For it will always be presumed, that men associate with persons of like dispositions

sitions with themselves. It cannot well be imagined, how friendship can long subsist between opposite tempers and inclinations. When men are so widely different in their sentiments and principles, in their pursuits and aversions, as the good and the vicious, it is impossible but they must soon grow burdensome and uneasy to one another. Those things which are the mirth and pleasure of the one, provoke the indignation and abhorrence of the other; and under these perpetual occasions of offence, familiarity must grow cold, and each be inclined to seek his entertainment in more agreeable company. And accordingly it is found in fact and experience, that the sentiments and inclinations, the virtues and vices of men, are what range and sort out mankind into their lesser kinds of societies. It will therefore, I say, be always, and with reason concluded, that he who herds with wicked men, is himself of the same character. Whatever virtues may appear in him, they will be esteemed an hypocritical imposture on the world; and in his more retired pleasures, he will be presumed as much a libertine as the rest of his company: and consequently, we can

can by no other conduct avoid this appearance of evil, and preserve the reputation of our virtue, but by confining our friendships to good men. This argument, which dissuades from an intimacy with wicked men, from its effects on our reputation, may perhaps seem rather prudential, than religious. But if we reflect, what scandal we give to many weak men, by so offensive a conduct; how it unqualifies us for the instruction or reproof of others; how it corrupts our example, and gives countenance to the vicious and prophane; we shall be convinced that this motive is properly christian, and ought to be regarded from considerations of great importance to religion.

But, our associating ourselves with good men, is not only a proof and evidence of our virtue, but the most effectual method both to retain and improve it. Our advantage from the conversation of good men, may be considered more particularly with respect to their discourse, and their example. "The mind of the righteous," says the Psalmist, "will be exercised in wisdom, and his mouth will be talking of judgment."

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From him shall we learn, and by just arguments be confirmed in true principles of faith and morality. The maxims that govern his conduct, are such as equally tend to promote private and public happiness; and even his mirth is bounded by innocence and purity; and the sense of his own duty will engage him to cultivate the same just sentiments and good dispositions in those he converses with; to instruct their ignorance, reform their errors, and, as the apostle says, "minister grace unto the hearers." Perhaps, indeed, the gentle admonitions wherewith good men will rebuke the imperfections of their friends, may be uneasy to the pride of some tempers; but these "precious balms," as the Psalmist calls them, are freedoms which wise and virtuous men will esteem rather as favours, than affronts. David, though a prince, was sensible that his failings and miscarriages would make this consequence inseparable from his chusing the society of good men: but yet, rather than he would take refuge with the men that wrought wickedness, he makes it his request to God, that "the righteous" should smite "him friendly, and reprove him." And indeed

indeed there is no surer argument of a good understanding, and a christian disposition, than being sensible of the friendship of a proper reproof. But the instructions and reproofs of good men can hardly fail of these beneficial effects on those who converse with them, when we consider how they are enforced by a correspondent example. When we find a man prescribe nothing to us but his own constant practice, we can have no suspicion of disguise or insincerity : he is himself what he desires us to be, and therefore gives us the greatest security that he intends our happiness in the methods of life he advises, since he pursues the same in his own.

Example is confessed to have this advantage over all other methods of instruction, that it not only teaches us our duty, but convinces us of the possibility of our imitation. When we see a man of like passions and weakness with ourselves, and no otherwise assisted than we either are, or may be, going before us in the paths of duty, it confutes all lazy pretences of impossibility ; it reproaches our imperfection ; and if we have any thing generous in our temper, it shames us into
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emulation. Nay, I would observe farther, that the example of a good man is, generally speaking, the best direction we can follow in the performance of our duty. The most exact rules and precepts are liable to be misunderstood; some capacities at least will mistake their meaning; and though they sincerely endeavour to obey, will act far from the intention of those who delivered them. But the example of the wise and good man ascertains the sense of the precept, and shews plainly how it is to be obeyed: and the meanest capacity, when he sees a rule practicably applied before his eyes, can no longer be at a loss how it is to be performed. It may be observed also under this head, that self-love is a very partial interpreter. We are apt to be fond of our opinions and practice, and perhaps without perceiving it, to bend and accommodate the rule in favour of them: but when we apply it to the actions of other men, we judge with less interest, and consequently with more impartiality; whence it often happens that the notions of duty which we form from the example of others, are more correct and just than those we derive from the rule itself. To these

these advantages of conversing with good examples, we must add one which I think still greater, and that is the encouragement we receive in the performance of our duty. The shame of being singular is a weakness which has debauched the best and most ingenuous dispositions: but now by a constant view of good examples, we find that we are not alone, that we have numbers enough on our side to countenance us in our profession: and especially when we see wise men, persons of character and esteem, examples of duty, we are convinced that piety is no disreputable qualification, and that we need not be ashamed of our virtue; it will confirm our resolution against the railleries or reproaches of the profane, and give us courage and confidence in the path of religion.

The conversation of good men may be farther recommended to our choice, from reasons of prudence and discretion. While we confine our intercourse to persons of this character, we are in no danger of treachery in our friendships, of fraud or injustice in our commerce: we have a security firmer than that of bonds and covenants, in their conscience and

integrity : we are assured of a ready assistance in all our exigencies, from a conviction of their own duty : we have the satisfaction of conversing with men, whose passions are under government and discipline ; not to be affronted with trifles, nor provoked to any unreasonable resentment ; with difficulty moved, and easily appeased : men who are just and good-natured out of principle, in whose conversation we are secured from the slanders of the malicious, the envy of the spiteful, the censures of the impertinent, and the contempt of the proud : and in general, since so great a part of the uneasiness we complain of in this world is brought upon us by the villanies and passions of unrighteous men, we can by no conduct more probably secure our happiness, than by confining our intercourse to men of virtue and religion.

The importance of chusing virtuous companions will farther appear, if we consider the dangers and inconveniences we expose ourselves to, by being companions of wicked men.

“ Evil communications,” says the apostle, “ corrupt good manners :” the best resolved

resolved virtue cannot long defend its integrity against the continual solicitations of a vicious acquaintance. As to our principles, the natural pride of men will make them restless and uneasy, till they get their sentiments and opinions received by those they converse with, and, till this is obtained, it is not society, but endless wrangling and controversy. And as to practice, the desire we have to endear ourselves to those we converse with, will insensibly engage us in the same pleasures and aversions with them: and it must be observed, as a farther circumstance of our danger, that the loose and dissolute are very industrious in communicating their principles, and gaining proselytes to sin. The natural shame and diffidence that attends vice, makes them zealous to encourage themselves by numbers, and to form a party against religion: it is with pride they survey their increasing strength, and begin to think themselves a match for virtue. But it is with more than ordinary triumph they corrupt a man of pious and virtuous principles. It soothes their fears, and gives some ease to their scruples, to gain a convert who

seemed to have all the conviction that religion could afford: this they are ready to look upon as a determination on their side, and decisive of the controversy between vice and virtue: and this is a conquest they never fail to attempt with the greatest application. For a virtuous man, while he preserves that character, is a restraint upon their conversation. They look upon him, as the wise man describes their sentiments, "as grievous to their eyes to behold," as one made to reprove their thoughts, to upbraid them with their offending the law, and to reproach them with having forsaken the principles of their education: and therefore they never fail of using the most artful and indefatigable address to silence this impertinent adviser, whose severity awes their excesses, and restrains their freedom. And alas! it is but too often and too easily they prevail.

What but extraordinary resolution, supported by the aids of religion, can preserve even a well-inclined temper from the infection of a loose and profane conversation, where vice appears with the advantages of fashion and reputation,
and

and virtue on the contrary, is traduced and ridiculed? If he behaves with that sobriety and reserve, which his religion requires from him; if he either reproves the immoral freedom, or refuses his applause to the profane mirth of his company, he is either quarrelled with for impertinence, or reproached for affectation and singularity. And how few instances have we of a courage that can stand the shock of being the jest of his familiars: even modesty and good manners will help to corrupt him, and good nature itself will endanger his virtue. In fine; what advantages can we expect, or rather what consequences are too terrible to be feared, from mixing in conversation where irreligion and profaneness, where a defiance of all rules, and a contempt of all that is holy, are the principles, and lewdness, intemperance, and vanity the diversions of the company; where the modest sinner is taught to ridicule Providence, conscience, and duty? His reluctance to disobedience will gradually wear off under these impressions, and sin become every day more familiar, and less formidable: he will advance from

one degree of wickedness and impenitence to another, till at the last he becomes hardened without remorse or concern, and past hopes of recovery.

If then our virtue and integrity have so close a dependance on the choice of our intimate friends; if the society of good men be so necessary to direct and confirm us in duty, and the conversation of wicked men so destructive of our principles and good habits; as we value the favour of God and good men here, and the inestimable rewards of obedience hereafter, let us with our utmost care make the important choice, and let us remember that we are chusing vice or virtue, happiness or misery.

Thanks be to God, the world is not yet so bad, that we need fear the want of virtuous companions; the righteous are not so failed from the earth, but we may still find men of virtue and piety enough for the intimacies of friendship, and the entertainments of conversation: or whatever we may want in the numbers of our acquaintance will be abundantly made up to us in their value. Nay even this complaint will every day lessen upon our hands; the credit and honour we shall retrieve

retrieve to virtue by this conduct, will irresistibly gain it converts, and we shall at the same time have the satisfaction of making and enjoying good men.

To conclude; Let neither the power nor quality of the great, nor the wit of the pleasant; let neither interest, vanity, nor fear prevail with us, to court the favour, to flatter the vices, or applaud the profaneness of wicked men. Virtue and religion, heaven and eternal happiness, are not trifles to be given up in a compliment, or sacrificed to a jest. And if we are either ashamed or afraid to defend the cause of religion, and give countenance to the servants of Christ here, of us shall the Son of man be ashamed, before his Father and the Holy Angels.

S E R M O N I V.

DOMESTIC LOVE AND UNION
RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED.

PROVERBS XV. 17.

*Better is a dinner of herbs where love is,
than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.*

IT is hard to form a true estimate of any man's happiness; because happiness depends most upon those things which lie most out of sight. Those joys, like those sorrows, are most real, deep, and strong, which run on in a silent stream without making any noise; such are the

joys which arise from easy reflections, moderate desires, and calm content.

We see the false glare of greatness which surrounds some men, and are apt to gaze at it with a foolish face of wonder; but we see not those miseries which sometimes lurk beneath those pompous appearances.

What avails all the pomp and parade of life, which appears abroad; if, when we shift the gaudy flattering scene, the man is unhappy, where happiness must begin, at home? Whatever ingredients of bliss Providence may have poured into his cup, domestic misfortunes will render the whole composition distasteful. Fortune and happiness are two very distinct ideas; however some, who have a false idea of life and a wrong turn of thinking, may confound them.

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.” That is, it is better to have peace without plenty, than plenty without peace: that where there is but a slender subsistence, yet an uninterrupted interchange of mutual endearments, among those of the same family, imparts a more solid satisfaction, than to fare sumptuously

sumptuously every day, or to live in great and pompous buildings, great and noble apartments, every thing great, but perhaps the owners themselves.

Quietness under one's own roof, and quietness in one's own conscience, are two substantial blessings, which, whoever barter for shew and pomp, will find himself a loser by the exchange. Abroad, we must more or less find tribulation; yet, as long as our home is a secure and peaceful retreat from all the disappointments and cares, which we meet with in that great scene of vexation the world, we may still be tolerably happy: but if that, which should be our main sanctuary from uneasiness, becomes our principal scene of disquietude, how great must our uneasiness be! There cannot be a greater curse, than to have those of our own household our greatest foes; when we can neither live happily with them, nor must think of living apart from them.

It was wisely ordained by nature, that whereas, if our benevolence were to be equally strong to all mankind alike, it would be lost in a multiplicity of objects, and distracted in its choice; therefore it should be the strongest,

where there are the closest ties of relation. Our benevolence is like attraction, "which increases as the distances diminish; and then operates most powerfully, when bodies make the nearest approaches to one another." It is the voice of nature, which calls within us, and reason seconds that call, when all other circumstances are equal, to love our relations better than our neighbours, and our neighbours than mere strangers.

We then counteract the design of nature, and consequently of the Author of nature, when we do not endeavour to contribute as much as in us lies to their ease and happiness, with which our own is so essentially interwoven. "Is it not strange," says an ingenious writer, "that some should be so delicate as not to bear a disagreeable picture in the house, and yet force every face they see about them, to wear a gloom of uneasiness and discontent?" Yet this is no uncommon character. Nay, there shall often be a certain shyness, coldness and fullness in families, where there is no material ground of domestic animosities: and these differences shall be often the most lasting. For when anger or uneasiness

siness immediately vents itself in words, the malignity of the passion is soon discharged: then it is most fatal and pernicious, when the wound rankles and festers within, when the mind preys upon itself, without disclosing the subject of its grievances.

The affronts that are put upon us by strangers, make, comparatively, but feeble and languid impressions: but those that proceed from persons endeared to us by the closest relation of blood and kindred, wound us in the most tender and sensible part. There are two things that affect the heart of every ingenuous man most deeply; good-natured and generous offices from those to whom we have been injurious; and an ill-natured and unfriendly treatment from those to whom we have been very kind and affectionate. As for the former, we can make a shift to bear their hatred, because we have deserved it: but we cannot bear their love; it quite confounds and overpowers us. And as to the latter, it is certain we can endure the utmost rancour and malice of others, much better than the least coldness and indifference from those, whom we have made it our
constant

constant endeavour to please. Very beautiful in this light are the words of the Psalmist: "For it is not an open enemy
" that hath done me this dishonour: for
" then I could have borne it; neither
" was it mine adversary that did magnify
" himself against me: for then perad-
" venture I would have hid myself from
" him. But it was even thou, my com-
" panion, my guide, and mine own fa-
" miliar friend."

Love is a tender plant; it must be kept alive by great delicacy, it must be fenced from all inclement blasts, or it will soon droop its head and die. Indeed, in general we ought to be very tender (we can scarce be too much so) as to what may affect another: otherwise we do, we know not what. For no man can tell, unless he could feel for him, how much another may suffer by any unkind thing we say or do. An angry word will give a deeper wound to some minds, than an injurious action will to others, who are too hard to suffer any impression to be made upon them: and perhaps most men feel more in the whole of their life, from the "scornful reproofs of the wealthy, the despitfulness of the proud,"
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taunting sarcasms and little instances of ill-will, neglect and contempt, than they do from the more solid evils of life. These are the little thorns and briars, which (though men of a rougher mold may make their way through them without feeling much) extremely incommode persons of a more refined turn in their journey through life, and make their travelling irksome and unpleasant: though they do not distress them so much, as the deep waters, that threaten to swallow them up.

But the unkindly behaviour of bosom friends and dearest relations gives the most exquisite sensations of distress; as on the other hand, a grateful, humane deportment from them gives the finest and most delicate touches of pleasure. Every trifling service, that is an evidence and expression of their love, is received by us, as if it were a substantial obligation, and nothing can come from their hearts, but what proportionably affects ours.

To see a well regulated family acting, as if they were one body informed by one soul, where "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it;" to see those,
who

who are embarked together in one bottom, whose interests are inseparably united, and therefore whose hearts ought to be so too, acting in concert, adopting each others cares and making them their own, uniting their friendly beams, and jointly promoting the common happiness; is a beautiful scene and amiable even in the sight of that Being, “who maketh
“men to be of one mind in a house.
“How pleasant a thing is it for brethren to
“dwell together in unity!” To have those always near us who will receive us with an open-hearted cheerfulness, to whom we can discharge the fulness of the soul, to whom we can unburthen our cares;—and by unburthening we lessen them, for sorrow, like a stream, grows weaker, by being divided into several channels:—to have those, with whom we can share our joys—and joy, like light, by communicating grows greater, and burns brighter—this, this is a happiness, which a forlorn individual must be in a great measure a stranger to, who stands single in life, without any support to lean upon.

But the greatest advantage of a friendly behaviour to domestics is, that thereby we contract and cultivate that habit of
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benevolence, which is a necessary qualification for everlasting happiness. We are apt to overlook and disregard our daily behaviour to one another in company, and the common occurrences of life, as little and trivial: whereas, though they are little in themselves, they are not so in their consequences: they are the very foundation upon which we must build a habit of benevolence. For a habit of benevolence must be contracted and kept alive, as all other habits are, by constant exercise. Now our daily behaviour to our domestics gives us an occasion for an uninterrupted exercise of benevolence; and scarce any thing else does so. It is not then enough to say or think, we will serve our friends and relations upon any *material* occasions; but, as for a constant complacency and obligingness in our common behaviour, to imagine, we may be dispensed with from observing it. For these acts of solid and substantial kindness we are seldom impowered to do; they are extraordinary emergencies, which do not constantly occur: and a settled bent of good-will must be acquired, not by what is occasional, not by what seldom occurs; but by repeated and numerous

merous acts, by a daily and uninterrupted discharge of the common offices of humanity; by saying a thousand obliging things, and by doing, if possible, more obliging things than we say. It is not in every person's power, because he has not a fortune answerable to it, to form a standing habit of charity, by redressing the injured, relieving the distressed, and cherishing men of merit; but it is in every one's power to beget in himself this lovely disposition of mind, by studying to adjust his temper to theirs, with whom he lives; by complying with their humours as far as he innocently can; by soothing their distresses, bearing with their infirmities, and by incommoding himself in some points to gratify others. On the contrary the indulgence of an occasional fit of ill humour paves the way to an habitually bad temper. And to those, who think it a small matter, Solon's answer is a very just one; "Yes, but custom is a great one."

Such are the advantages and pleasures of domestic love and union. To assist you in preserving and cultivating it, let me recommend to your attention the following hints of advice.

In

In the first place; Do not delude yourself with any visionary notions of perfection. There are not many, who can stand the test of a close inspection: their virtues shine upon us at a distance; it is upon a nearer approach that we descry their failings. The distant ground which is adorned with variety of flowers, seems to be all in flower, and to glow with one continued and unmixed lustre; but, if we were upon the spot, we should discover several weeds interspersed amidst such a beautiful assemblage of colours. We may admire upon a slender acquaintance the saint, philosopher, and hero; but upon a closer survey we always discover some tincture of the mere man to sully the brightness of these exalted characters. Familiarity, though it does not beget contempt, where there is true worth; yet always takes off admiration and wonder, always the property of raw unfurnished minds, acquainted with, and unpractised in, the world. Those, who look into, and see through, things, find nothing wonderful, but one; and that is he, who is great, wonderful, and holy: nothing is truly marvellous, but what he is, and what he doth. Nay the follies of men are often so strongly interwoven

woven with their virtue, that we cannot gather up the tares, without rooting up at the same time the wheat.

Let us therefore learn to make proper allowances, and to represent their failings with all the softenings of humanity. Those who are continually complaining that things run cross, that the world is much worse than it should be, have very great reason to complain, that there is one individual person in it much worse than he should be; who cannot bear the accidents of life with tolerable patience, nor look upon mankind with common charity. Men are uneasy in themselves, and then shift the blame off from themselves upon the persons they converse with, and the times and places they live in.

Bear then with the faults of those about you, as you expect they should bear with yours; faults, which frail nature cannot well guard against, and which therefore good nature should overlook: be just to their merits, charitable to their failings, and tender to their misfortunes. All other ornaments fade and decay, and sorrow or age makes "beauty consume away like as it were a moth fretting a garment;" There is one only unfading beauty,

beauty, one undecaying ornament, which is infinitely more worth than all the rest, and that is the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit."

Farther to promote domestic happiness, observe and practise the rules of good manners. By good manners I do not mean an insignificant punctuality, and a frivolous exactness in the observation of little ceremonies: I mean something of an higher nature, an assemblage of moral virtues expressed in our outward demeanour; a combination of discretion, circumspection, and civility; submission to our superiors, condescension to our inferiors, and affability to all; more especially a strict regard to decency in all our actions. For the rules of decency are the very outworks of respect, and when they are once broken through, the rest will soon be delivered up as an easy prey: and affection is oftener lost by little violations of the rules of decorum, than by any scandalous and enormous faults.

Again, be particularly cautious in the moments of anger and resentment. Never make any reply to a person, till his passion abates, and the ferment subsides.

For

For to what end should you expostulate with a man in a passion? That he may hear reason? But how can you expect he can hear reason, as long as his passion has got the better of his reason? How can you expect he should hear the voice of that charmer, whom anger has made deaf to all its remonstrances? Wait but till reason resumes its empire; and then speak to him, in the softer seasons of address: if there be any necessity for it, if the affair be of such an importance as to require a fair hearing. Otherwise, it is a matter of discretion to drop it entirely, lest his passion should rekindle; for reason is often retained on the side of passion, and is set at work, in our cooler hours, to find out specious excuses for what we said or did, in the heat and warmth of temper. And as you are not to reprimand any person during the emotion of his passion; so neither are you to do it during the emotion of your own. What the philosopher said about punishing, you may apply here and say, "I would chide you, if I were not angry." For you will be apt to carry things too far: or if you did not, yet what you say will have less weight, as it will be looked upon

upon as the result of rage and fury, not the dictate of cool sedate reason.

Guard against pride, from which cometh contention. Persons of sense and virtue will seldom differ about things that are plainly essential to their mutual happiness: the greatest danger is, that they should disagree about trifles, where each will think they cannot give up the point without yielding the other the superiority: and the disagreement is often the sharpest where the difference is the smallest. Do not imagine that every person must perfectly adjust their temper to yours in every point, so as to be your exact counterpart. If men recede in some particulars from their own inclinations to comply with those of others, there is some prospect that differences may be adjusted, and a good understanding kept up: like irregular stones, that must have their unevennesses filed off, and their rough corners smoothed, before they can come together, and join to make a compact building, where there shall be harmony and symmetry of parts. There is but one Being, whose will we ought to submit to intirely and unreservedly; and his will is perfect un-
allayed

allayed reason, without the least mixture of caprice or humour. Vain is all strife for superiority, where the only strife should be, which should oblige each other the most; and the only power, that should be lodged in any person, should be, a greater power of doing good. Never strive to gain an absolute sway over any thing, but your own passions.

Be not ashamed to confess, you have been in the wrong. It is but owning, what you need not be ashamed of; that you now have more sense, than you had before, to see your error, more humility, to acknowledge it, and more virtue to correct it. We double the greatest part of our faults, by the excuses, which we make use of to justify them: excuses which are a kind of patches, when a rent is made; far more unseemly and misbecoming, than the rent itself. It is a sign, a man is generally in the right, who has the ingenuity to own himself sometimes in the wrong; that he is one of those, whose fund of reputation is so great, he is not afraid of impoverishing it, by taking or losing a little from it: whereas those, whose stock of credit and esteem

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is very inconsiderable, care not to own any thing at the expence of it.

But above all, lastly, religion is absolutely necessary to preserve domestic union. For families are but little societies, as societies are larger families; and therefore religion, which is confessedly the best bond and cement of union in states and larger communities, is likewise so in little domestic governments. Often then lead your offspring and dependents to look upwards from yourself, who are the head of a small family, to him, of "whom the whole family in heaven and earth is called." By solemn acts of devotion establish in their minds and your own the sentiments of genuine piety. You will thus find that union of souls begun here, which will be perfected above, where love and charity never fail. Death, which dissolves the union of soul and body, cannot dissolve the inviolable union of virtuous hearts joined together in pure, un sullied friendship. Those, who were lovely and loving in their lives; shall not, even by their deaths, be divided for ever. Separated for a while, they shall meet again, where there shall be no second separation, where they shall continue to be "of one heart and of one mind."

S E R M O N V.

THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM
RECOMMENDED TO YOUTH.

PROVERBS xviii. 1.

Through desire, a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with wisdom.

DULL and insipid is every performance, where inclination bears no part: but a strong desire to do our duty overcomes the difficulties that lie in the way to the doing of it, and the very labour of love is a pleasure. The heart

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will set every engine at work, when it is rightly engaged on the side of knowledge. No social diversion, no pleasure will interrupt its pursuits; because then it will be its greatest pleasure to “seek and intermeddle with wisdom.”

A total separation, however, from society, and the pleasures thereof, cannot be the meaning of the author, because that is contrary to the main tenor of the book of Proverbs; and, besides it is obvious to observe, that any one man’s sense, however excellent, unless it mixes in society with that of others, always degenerates into singularity and caprice.

When there is no reason against any social (or indeed any other) pleasure, there is always a reason for it, that it is a pleasure; just as when there is no reason to undergo any pain, there is one always why we should not, that it is a pain. To suppose the Deity would abridge us of any pleasure merely as such, when it does not interfere with higher and nobler delights, is a notion highly derogatory to his goodness, who, in forming the world, seems in many things to have consulted our pleasure only, without any other apparent end in view.

Diversions

Diversions are necessary to deceive the cares, sweeten the toils, and smooth the ruggedness of life. Man is a strange compound of greatness and littleness. There is something so great in our frame, that we cannot be happy without such substantial pleasures, as will stand the test of our severest reflections: and yet withal something so little in our composition, that we cannot be altogether without such innocent amusements, as may take our minds off from abstract ideas, and gently lead them into the more familiar traces of thought. And he, who applies himself to his studies, or any other employment, with proper intervals of refreshment to recruit his spirits, will upon the whole do more good, as he bids fairer to prolong his life, than he, who, by too eager and uninterrupted an application, deadens his spirits, impairs his health, and wears out the very springs of action.

An occasional dissipation of thought may be sometimes requisite for the over-pensive and thoughtful; as a recollection of thought is for men of quite a different turn.

This caution however in general, is highly necessary: that we ought to guard

most against that extreme, to which human nature leans the most; which is, by no means, that of an over-strict application to wisdom. For we are rather apt to lessen, than enlarge the bounds of our duty; and on the other hand to extend too far, than to shorten the line of our liberty.

There is such a principle of activity in human nature, especially in youth, that there is no great danger we should fall into a habit of doing nothing at all: the greatest hazard is, that we should contract a habit of doing nothing to the purpose, and of trifling away life in an impertinent course of diversions. An inactive state of inaction is not to be dreaded: what we are to guard against, is, that we do not fall into an easy insignificance of action, persevere in it, and then go out of the world with this melancholy reflection, that we have scarce done one action, for which it was worth coming into it: our lives being like "a tale that is told;" a tale harmless, it may be, inoffensive and far spun out, but very insipid, trifling and unmeaning, containing no useful moral, or rational entertainment; scarce worth the minding, while the
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thread of it was carrying on, ending as poorly as it begun, and forgotten almost as soon as over.

It is necessary to habituate our minds, in our younger years, to some employment, which may engage our thoughts, and fill the capacity of the soul at a riper age. For, however we may roam in youth from folly to folly, too volatile for rest, too soft and effeminate for industry; ever ambitious to make a splendid figure, and to shine before men, but never endeavouring to "glorify our Father which is in heaven:" yet the time will come, when we shall outgrow the relish of childish amusements. And, if we are not provided with a taste for manly satisfactions to succeed in their room, we must of course become miserable at an age more difficult to be pleased. While men, however unthinking and unemployed, enjoy a perpetual flow of vigorous spirits; a constant succession of gay ideas, which flutter and sport in the brain, makes them pleased with themselves, and with every thing as trifling as themselves. But, when the ferment of their blood abates, and the freshness of their youth, like the morning dew, passes away; their

spirits flag for want of entertainments more satisfactory in themselves, and more suited to a manly age: and the soul from a sprightly impertinence, from quick sensations, and florid desires, subsides into a dead calm, and sinks into stupidity. The fire of a glowing imagination (the property of youth) may make folly look pleasing, and lend a beauty to objects which have none inherent in them: just as the sun beams may paint a cloud, and diversify it with beautiful stains of light, however dark, unsubstantial and empty in itself. But nothing can shine with undiminished lustre, but religion and knowledge, which are essentially and intrinsically bright. Take it therefore for granted, which you will find by experience, that nothing can be long entertaining, but what is in some measure beneficial: because nothing else will bear a calm and sedate review.

You may be admired for a while, upon the account of good nature, the inseparable attendant upon a flush of sanguine health, and a fulness of youthful spirits: but you will find, in process of time, that among the wise and good, useless good nature is the object of pity, ill nature

ture of hatred; but nature beautified and improved by an assemblage of moral and intellectual endowments, is the only object of a solid and lasting esteem.

There is not a greater inlet to misery and vice of all kinds, than the not knowing how to pass our vacant hours. For what remains to be done, when the first part of their lives, who are not brought up to any manual employment, is slipped away without an acquired relish for reading, or taste for other rational satisfactions? Shall they continue to pursue their pleasures?—Religion apart, common prudence will warn them to tie up the wheel, as they begin to go down the hill of life. Shall they then apply themselves to their studies?—Alas! the seed time of life is already past: the enterprising and spirited ardor of youth being over, without having been applied to those valuable purposes for which it was given; all ambition of excelling upon generous and laudable schemes quite stagnates. If they have not some poor expedient to deceive the time, or, to speak more properly, to deceive themselves; the length of a day will seem tedious to them, who perhaps have the

unreasonableness to complain of the shortness of life in general. When the former part of our life has been nothing but vanity, the latter end of it can be nothing but vexation. In short, we must be miserable, without some employment to fix, or some amusement to dissipate our thoughts: the latter we cannot command in all places, nor relish at all times; and therefore there is an absolute necessity for the former. We may pursue this or that new pleasure; we may be fond for a while of a new acquisition: but when the graces of novelty are worn off, and the briskness of our first desire is over, the transition is very quick and sudden, from an eager fondness to a cool indifference. Hence there is a restless agitation in our minds, still craving something new, still unsatisfied with it, when possessed; till melancholy increases, as we advance in years, like shadows lengthening towards the close of day.

Hence it is, that men of this stamp are continually complaining, that the times are altered for the worse: because the sprightliness of their youth represented every thing in the most engaging light; and when men are in high good humour
with

with themselves, they are apt to be so with all around them: the face of nature brightens up, and the sun shines with a more agreeable lustre. But when old age has cut them off from the enjoyment of false pleasures, and habitual vice has given them a distaste for the only true and lasting delights; when a retrospect of their past lives presents nothing to view but one wide track of uncultivated ground; a soul distempered with spleen, remorse, and an insensibility of rational satisfaction, darkens and discolours every object; and the change is not in the times, but in them, who have been forsaken by those gratifications, which they would not forsake.

How much otherwise is it with those, who have laid up an inexhaustible fund of knowledge! When a man has been laying out that time in the pursuit of some great and important truth, which others waste in a circle of gay follies; he is conscious of having acted up to the dignity of his nature; and from that consciousness there results that serene complacency, which, though not so violent, is much preferable to the pleasures of the animal life. He can travel on from

strength to strength: for, in literature as in war, each new conquest, which he gains, impowers him to push his conquests still farther, and to enlarge the empire of reason. Thus he is ever in a progressive state, still making new acquisitions, still animated with hopes of future discoveries.

Some may alledge, in opposition to what I have said, and as an excuse for their indolence, the want of proper talents to make any progress in learning. To which I answer, that few stations require uncommon abilities to discharge them well; for the ordinary offices of life, that share of apprehension which falls to the bulk of mankind, provided we improve it, will serve well enough. Bright and sparkling parts are like diamonds, which may adorn the proprietor, but are not necessary for the good of the world: whereas common sense is like current coin; we have, every day, in the ordinary occurrences of life, occasion for it: and if we would but call it into action, it would carry us much greater lengths than we seem to be aware of. Men may extol, as much as they please, fine, exalted, and superior sense: yet
common

common sense, if attended with humility and industry, is the best guide to beneficial truth, and the best preservative against any fatal errors in knowledge, and notorious misconduct in life. For none are, in the nature of the thing, more liable to error, than those who have a distaste for plain sober sense and close reasoning; which yet is the case of those, whose warm and elevated imagination, whose uncommon fire and vivacity, make them in love with nothing, but what is striking, and marvellous. For great wits, like great beauties, look upon mere esteem as a flat insipid thing; nothing less than admiration will content them. To gain the good will of mankind by being useful to them, is, in their opinion, a low and groveling aim: their ambition is to draw the eyes of the world upon them by dazzling and surprising them; a temper which draws them off from the love of truth, and consequently subjects them to gross mistakes. For they will not love truth as such; they will love it only, when it happens to be surprising and uncommon, which few important truths are: the love of novelty will be the predominant passion; that of truth will only

only influence them, when it does not interfere with it. Perhaps nothing sooner leads men out of the road of truth, than to have the wild dancing light of a bright imagination playing before them. Perhaps they have too much life and spirit to have patience enough to go to the bottom of a subject, and trace up every argument, through a long tedious process, to its original. Perhaps they have that delicacy of make, which fits them for a swift and speedy race; but does not enable them to carry a great weight, or to go through any long journey. Whereas men of fewer ideas, who lay them in order, compare, and examine them, and go on, step by step, in a gradual chain of thinking; make up by industry and caution, what they want in quickness of apprehension.

Be not discouraged, if you do not meet with success at first. Observe, (for it lies within the compass of any man's observation) that he, who has been long habituated to one kind of knowledge, is utterly at a loss in another, to which he is unaccustomed; till, by repeated efforts, he finds a progressive opening of his faculties: and then he wonders, how he could be so long in finding
out

out a connexion of ideas, which, to a practised understanding, is very obvious. But by neglecting to use your faculties, you will, in time, lose the very power of using them: according to that of our blessed Saviour, *from him that hath not any additional improvement, shall be taken away even that which he hath*, the original talent intrusted to him.

Others there are, who plead an exemption from study, because their fortune makes them independent of the world, and they need not be beholden to it for their support. That is, because their situation in life exempts them from the necessity of spending their time in servile offices and hardships, therefore they may dispose of it just as they please. This is to imagine, that, because God has empowered them to single out the best means of employing their hours; in reading, meditation, in the highest instances of piety and charity; therefore they may throw them away in a round of impertinence, vanity, and folly. The apostle's rule, that "if any man will not work, neither should he eat;" extends to the rich as well as poor; only supposing, that there are different kinds of work assigned to each.

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The reason is the same in both cases; that he who will do no good, ought not to receive or enjoy any. As we all are joint traders and partners in life, he forfeits his right to any share in the common stock of happiness, who does not endeavour to contribute his allotted part to it: the public happiness being nothing but the sum total of each individual's contribution to it. An easy fortune does not set men free from labour and industry in general; it only exempts them from some particular kinds of labour. It is not a blessing as it gives them liberty to do nothing at all; but as it gives them liberty wisely to chuse, and steadily to prosecute the most ennobling exercises, and the most improving employments, the pursuit of truth, the practice of virtue, the service of that God "who giveth them all things richly to enjoy;" in short, the doing and being every thing that is commendable. That time, which others must employ in tilling the ground (which often deceives their expectation) with the sweat of their brow, they may lay out in cultivating the mind, a soil always grateful to the care of the tiller.

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The sum of what I would say is this : that, though you are not confined to any particular calling, yet you have a general one; which is, to watch over your heart, and to improve your head; to make yourself master of all those accomplishments,—an enlarged compass of thought, that flowing humanity, and generosity—which are necessary to *become* a great fortune; and of all those perfections—moderation, humility, and temperance—which are necessary to *bear* a small one patiently. But especially it is your duty to acquire a taste for those pleasures, which, after they are tasted, go off agreeably, and leave behind them a grateful and delightful flavour on the mind.

Happy that man, who, unembarrassed by vulgar cares, master of himself, his time and fortune, spends his leisure in making himself wiser; and his fortune in making others (and therefore himself) happier : who, thinks himself not complete, till his understanding be beautified with the valuable furniture of knowledge, and his heart enriched with every virtue : who has furnished himself with all the advantage

vantages to relish solitude, and enliven conversation ; who when serious, is not sullen ; and when chearful, not indiscreetly gay ; whose ambition is not to be admired for a false glare of greatness, but to be beloved for the gentle and sober lustre of his wisdom and goodness. The greatest minister of state has not more business to do in a public capacity, than he, and indeed every man else, may find in the retired and still scenes of life. Even in his private walks, every thing that is visible convinceth him, there is present a Being invisible. Aided by natural philosophy, he reads plain legible traces of the Divinity in every thing he meets : he sees the Deity in every object around him ; and when he sees him, he adores him with the tribute of a grateful heart.

If you desire to qualify yourself for passing life thus agreeably and usefully, begin your pursuit of wisdom with those general principles which give a light to every part of literature ; make gradual advances, a slow, but sure progress ; travel gently, with proper guides to direct you, through the most beautiful and fruitful regions of knowledge in general ; before you fix yourselves in, and confine yourselves to any particular province of it.

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It is the great secret of education, not to make a man a complete master of any branch of science, but to give his mind that freedom, openness, and extent, which shall impower him to master it, or indeed any other, whenever he shall turn the bent of his studies that way: which is best done, by setting before him, in his earlier years, a general view of the whole intellectual world: whereas an early and intire attachment to one particular science, narrows the abilities of the mind to that degree, that he can scarce think out of the track to which he is accustomed.

In all your researches after truth, remember the imperfection of the human understanding, and consider that it is a sure indication of good sense to be diffident of it. We then, and not till then, are growing wise, when we begin to discern, how weak and ignorant we are. An absolute perfection of understanding is impossible: he makes the nearest approaches to it, who has the sense to discern, and the humility to acknowledge its imperfections. Modesty always sits gracefully upon youth: it covers a multitude of faults, and doubles the lustre of every virtue, which it seems to hide: the perfections of
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men being like those flowers, which appear more beautiful, when their leaves are a little contracted and folded up; than when they are full-blown, and display themselves, without any reserve, to the view.

To conclude; While you are eager in the pursuit of knowledge, forget not that there is one science, however, worth more than all the rest, and that is the science of living well; which shall remain, when, "whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." The knowledge and practice of true religion will support and invigorate the mind to the last, and most of all, at that important hour, which must decide our hopes and apprehensions: "the wisdom which, cometh from above," will not fail at last to bring us thither. All our other studies and pursuits, however different, ought to be subservient to, and centre in this grand point, the pursuit of eternal happiness, by being good in ourselves, and useful to the world. Soon, very soon, the disputer of this world may be no more.

But

But the meek and humble christian, who chiefly desired to understand, that he might direct his will, and to know, that he might act rightly, is a character, which will stand us in stead for ever; when pride and self-confidence shall be no more.

S E R M O N VI.

ON PERSECUTION.

LUKE ix. 55, 56.

But he turned, and rebuked them; and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

OUR Lord was now going up to Jerusalem, at one of the great feasts; probably that of tabernacles: and as he then came from Gallilee, he thought it

it proper to pass through Samaria. This was the direct road which it was then perhaps necessary for him to take, in order to his being at Jerusalem in due time. In this country, on Mount Gerizim, there was a temple built as a rival to that on Mount Zion, to which the Samaritans, who after their way kept the three great annual feasts appointed by Moses, were probably at this time preparing to resort. But as our Lord appeared to be passing by this temple, and setting his face towards that where the Jews worshipped, these bigotted Samaritans denied him the common rites of hospitality, and would not suffer him and his attendants so much as to refresh themselves at any of their inns; which seems to be all the favour they now asked. This was indeed very outrageous and inhumane treatment; and the apostles James and John, who were now present, resented it with a great deal of warmth. Full of zeal, and as they imagined of piety and faith too, they only ask leave of our Lord to command fire from heaven upon these unreasonable men.

How far they would have extended the execution, if our Lord had favoured their motion,

motion, we cannot certainly say : perhaps it had reached farther than to the persons from whom the offence directly came, and might have laid the whole city in ashes. Yet our gentle and compassionate Redeemer, far from indulging their request, very faithfully reproves it, and expressly says, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."

Now, surely, if our Lord thus severely rebuked his disciples for the proposal they here made, he would have censured them, with much greater displeasure, if they had talked of using his interest amongst the Jews, to raise an army to ravage Samaria by fire and sword ; and, on the same principle, to spread desolation over the face of the whole earth, wherever they and their doctrine had not met with a favourable reception. The argument urged in the text would have concluded against this with equal or superior force : "The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

You see then, how properly these words may be used, to introduce a discourse against persecution on any religious account : I shall therefore, without any farther preface, go on to propose what I

take to be the christian doctrine on this head ; and to offer some previous remarks toward stating the question aright, and preventing mistakes which often embarrass it.

I say, the christian doctrine, lest, if I call it the protestant, any should question the propriety of the expression. It is indeed too plain, that our first reformers, when they separated from other corruptions of the Romish church, retained this unhappy principle: "that error and heresy are to be extirpated by violence". Nor will I presume to say, that all protestants are now agreed in what I apprehend to be the truth here ; it would be much for their credit, and much for the interest of their cause, if they were. But I persuade myself, I am about to represent sentiments, in which multitudes of worthy and excellent men, of all parties amongst us, concur ; and they seem to be breaking in on mens minds with a growing light : may it "shine more and more, until the perfect day"! The protestant doctrine on this head, so far as protestants are consistent with themselves, seems plainly to be this : "that none are to be subjected to any kind or degrees of civil

“vil penalties, merely on account of their
“religious opinions, or for any practices
“arising from them, if those practices be
“not detrimental to the peace of society,
“which the magistrate, by his office,
“is engaged to preserve,”

We readily allow that if any man's religious principles carry him on to any actions injurious to others, in their persons or properties, he is to be restrained and punished, as any other offender might be. Should a man for instance offer his son as a sacrifice to Molech, he would justly be treated as a murderer, notwithstanding any plea of conscience which he might pretend to make. For the magistrate has no business with conscience, which is intirely under the jurisdiction of God, but must never be allowed as an excuse for an action injurious to others; for this very obvious reason, that if it should be so allowed, there would be no room for any penal laws at all, and consequently all civil government would be overthrown. For a bold and impudent malefactor would never fail to have recourse to this easy and unanswerable apology, if his judges were so weak as to admit it. Nor can we indeed imagine any blacker villainies,

lainies, than those which some have pretended to commit for conscience sake.

We likewise grant, on the same principle as before, that if any man's religion necessarily subject him to the obedience of a foreign prince, the government under which he is born and protected, has a right, by the grand law of self-preservation, to insist on some more than ordinary security for his good behaviour in such circumstances.

Allowing for such cases as these, which are not properly exceptions, we still maintain our proposition in its utmost extent; and assert, that no man is to suffer the least degree of punishment, either in his person or property, on account of his religious opinions, or of any practice consequent upon them, which is not an overt act, plainly inconsistent with the public peace, and punishable in any other subject. We do not indeed pretend to say, that the magistrate is obliged to make such provision for maintaining and accommodating those whom he apprehends to be teachers of error, as he may for those who are of his own sentiments, and consequently, whom he believes on the side of truth. This would be carrying matters

matters to an excess; but surely, he has no right to inflict any penalties upon them, nor, in any degree, to abridge them of those liberties to which peaceable subjects are entitled.

Having thus endeavoured clearly to state the proposition, I proceed to offer some obvious but important considerations for the proof of it.

And first; I observe that persecution for conscience sake, that is, inflicting penalties on men, merely for their religious principles or worship, is plainly founded on an absurd supposition, that one man has a right to judge for an other, in matters of religion. How absurd this supposition is, has been fully proved at large, by many excellent writers in this controversy; and must indeed be evident to every one, who observes the weakness of the human understanding, considers the natural equality of mankind, or has any just conceptions of religion, which, unless it arises from conviction is only an empty name. Nothing can be more contemptibly weak than the arguments by which the Romish church would appropriate this right to itself. Nevertheless, absurd as their pretence to infallibi-

lity is, I confess there is much more consistency in the persecutions of those who claim such a privilege, than of those who acknowledge they are destitute of it. Can any man, with the least colour of reason, pretend that I have a right to judge for myself, and yet punish me for using it? that is, for doing that which he acknowledges I have a right to do. To plead for it, would be a direct contradiction in terms. And if it should be said, as some have most weakly asserted, that the erroneous are to be punished, not for their opinions, but for their actions in consequence of those opinions, I would then enquire, for what actions? And how are these actions condemned? Not on account of their tendency to disturb and annoy the public; for that case has already been excluded from the charge of persecution: and, when that is excluded, I repeat the question, How are those actions condemned? Why, the persecutor must say, "I know them to be contrary to the divine law." But, how do you prove, that you are not mistaken? If you allow of argument on the head, you give up the cause of persecution so far. If you
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wave argument, you only in effect say, "The actions are wrong, because I condemn them;" in other words, "I am infallible, I am to judge for myself and you; and, by a parity of reason, for all the world besides." And who might not make that pretence? or, how should it ever be decided but by the sword?

Persecution is also evidently inconsistent with that obvious and fundamental principle of morality, That we should do to others, as we might reasonably desire they should do to us.

This is a rule which carries its own demonstration along with it; and it was intended on purpose to take off that bias of self-love, which would draw us aside from the strait line of equity, and lead us to be partial judges between our neighbours and ourselves. Now, I would ask the advocate for wholesome severities, how he would relish his own arguments, if they were turned upon himself? What if he were to go abroad into the world, amongst papists, if he be a protestant; amongst Mahometans, if he be a christian? Supposing he was to behave like an honest man, like a good neighbour, like a peaceable subject; avoiding what

would injure and provoke, and taking all opportunities to serve and oblige those about him: would he think that, merely because he refused to follow his neighbours to their altars, or their mosques, he should be seized and imprisoned, his goods confiscated, and his person condemned to tortures, or death? Undoubtedly, he would complain of this as a very great hardship. And what if one, who heard him plead for religious severities at home, were to remind him of it, would he not be wounded with his own arrows? What could he answer? "I am in the right, "and these people are in the wrong." Now, would not the inquisitor, or the Turk, cry full as loudly as he, "but we are in the right:" and they might justly add, "with what face can you complain of "us, for treating you in such a manner, "as, you must confess, you should think "yourself bound in conscience to treat "us, if we were in your power, as you "are in ours?" Surely, a man would see the absurdity and injustice of such a treatment, when it fell upon himself; when, with such measures as he had meted to others, it was measured to him again. And accordingly, I must observe, as many have

have done, that the effect of this argument is so cogent, that those who, when they have had the power in their own hands, have been least willing to tolerate others, have immediately found new light breaking in upon them, as soon as they have needed toleration themselves.

Persecution is likewise in its own nature absurd, as it is by no means calculated to answer the end which its patrons profess to intend by it.

If it does men good at all, it must be by making them truly religious. But what is true religion? Is it to repeat a creed, or subscribe a confession, to wear a name, or perform a ceremony? If it be, religion is much changed from what it was when the scriptures were written; and the nature of God must be intirely changed too, before such a religion can be acceptable to him, or before it can have the least value in his sight.

True religion must be founded in the inward conviction of the mind, or it is impossible it should be what yet it must be, "a reasonable service." Now let it be considered what violence and persecution can do, towards producing such an inward conviction. It cannot surely do

it immediately by its own power; because it is a demonstration that will at the same moment suit both the parts of a contradiction. And it is certain a man might as reasonably expect to bind an immaterial spirit with a cord, or to beat down a wall by an argument, as to convince the understanding by threats or by tortures. They may indeed make a man mad, but it is the hardest thing in the world to imagine how they should ever make him wise.

Not immediately, you will say; we grant that; but mediately they may; as by these severities his mind may be awakened to attend to arguments; thus a rational conviction may be introduced; and "the rod and reproof may give wisdom." But I confess I cannot see how a man is the more likely to judge of an argument because he hears it on the rack, or because he sees the lash, or perhaps the sword over his head, and trembles lest he should not believe it. There is, if you will pardon the expression, a kind of elasticity in the human mind; and the more violently it is pressed down and bent, the more forcibly does it endeavour to expand itself again. But if this
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were to be put out of the question, we may depend upon it that none will ever have the better opinion of any religion because it makes its professors very bad men; and so they will undoubtedly think their persecutors to be.

Nay indeed I should rather think that if they were pretty well satisfied in the religion of their country before, the very thought of its being defended and obtruded on others in this harsh and unnatural way, would be enough to raise some secret suspicions to its disadvantage: suspicions which perhaps might prevail, and impress the mind more strongly, where men were not allowed to give any vent to them; or even to propose their doubts, lest it should be looked upon as a crafty way of insinuating their heresies, and should be a word spoken against their estates, or perhaps against their lives. On the whole, persecution is much more likely to make men hypocrites than sincere converts. They may perhaps, if they have not a firm integrity, and heroic courage, change their profession, while they retain their sentiments; and, supposing them before to have been unwarily in the wrong, may learn, I will not say to barter away honesty

nefty for truth, (though that were a traffic which no wife man would covet) but rather to add falshood and villainy to error. How glorious a prize after all! especially, when we consider, at what an expence it is gained. Which leads me to add,

That persecution evidently tends to produce a great deal of mischief and confusion in the world.

It may truly be said, where persecution is, and that zeal, and rage which is inseparable from it, "there is confusion, and every evil work." It is mischievous to those on whom it falls, and in its consequences mischievous to others too; so mischievous, that one would wonder, that any wise princes should ever have admitted it into their dominions; or that they should not immediately banish it thence. This follows, in part, from what I said under the former head of my discourse; even where it succeeds so far, as to produce a change in men's forms of worship, it generally makes them no more than hypocritical professors of what they do not believe; and this must undoubtedly corrupt their characters: so that having been villains in one respect,
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it is very probable they will be so in another; and having brought deceit and falshood into their religion, they will easily bring it into their conversation and commerce.

This effect persecution will have where it is yielded to. In other respects it will be yet more immediately and apparently mischievous where it is opposed. And it is probable it will be often opposed, by those who have certainly a title to the greatest protection and favour of the government; I mean upright and conscientious men. An honest mind, zealous for what it apprehends to be the cause of truth, and animated by the thoughts of the divine presence and protection, will learn to say of "bonds and imprisonments," and even of torments, as St. Paul did; "none of these things move me," in such a cause, "neither count I my life dear unto me." As one very justly and finely expresses it: "Personal sufferings, which a well-meaning man undergoes for his conscience, are but such a kind of burthen to his mind, as feathers to an eagle or a falcon; which though in themselves considered they have a weight, in the situation in which they

“ they are placed about him, enable him
“ to soar towards heaven, and to reach
“ a height which makes him praised and
“ wondered at by beholders.” Nay, perhaps where there is no true religion, a native sense of honour in a generous mind may encourage it to endure some hardships for the cause of truth; not to say that sometimes on the principles hinted above, “ obstinacy may rise as the under-
“ standing is oppressed, and continue its
“ opposition for a while, merely to avenge
“ the cause of its injured liberty.”

And it is farther to be remembered, that where the persecution is not very extreme, and sometimes even where it is, spectators are brought to judge more favourably of the cause thus violently opposed, when they observe the fortitude with which the patrons of it endure hardships and severities, from which they might otherwise deliver themselves at so easy a rate. This made “ the blood of the martyrs,” what it was so often called, “ the seed of the church.” And something of the same spirit has appeared in succeeding ages. Now in proportion to the degree in which a prohibited religion spreads, persecution must spread and propagate itself

itself, and its desolations. And at this rate, if the persecution be severe, (as it must be in order to a victory) how many persons, how many families, must be undone by it!

When so much must be sacrificed to public orthodoxy and uniformity, who can wonder if such a degree of "oppression make a wise man mad," and force multitudes into desperate measures, most destructive to the community? Who can wonder if an injured and persecuted people rise up, I will not say in rebellion, for it deserves not that infamous name, but in a just and generous vindication of their liberties; and even when the event is most hazardous, chuse rather to die warm with their swords in their hands, than to perish perhaps by the artificial cruelties of a lingering execution, or to starve in the darkness and solitude of a dungeon?

I add; The christian religion, which we here suppose to be the cause of truth, must, humanly speaking, be not only obstructed but destroyed, should persecuting principles universally prevail.

What wise prince, who was a heathen or a Mahometan, would ever admit christian

tian preachers, if he knew that it was a principle of their religion, that as soon as the majority of the people were converted by arguments, the rest, and himself amongst them, if he continued obstinate, must be proselyted or extirpated by fire and sword? Surely if this were known to be the case, the secular power would at once seize on such missionaries as public enemies, and condemn the whole sect on this single tenet, whatever their other doctrines or precepts might be.

Nay farther, if it be, as the advocates for persecution generally suppose, a dictate of the law of nature, that the true religion is to be propagated by the sword, then it is certain that a Mahometan or an idolater with the same notion, supposing himself to have truth on his side (as no doubt many of them do suppose, and also admitting the principle we contest) must think himself obliged in conscience, if he have an opportunity to do it, to arm his powers for the extirpation of christianity. Thus a holy war must commence over the face of the whole earth, in which nothing but a miracle could render christians successful against so vast a disproportion in numbers. Now I think it hard
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to believe that to be a truth, which would naturally lead to the extirpation of truth in the world; or that a Divine Religion should carry in its bowels the principle of its own destruction.

If these reasonings be admitted, then persecution will by the light of nature appear so absurd, so unjust, and so mischievous a thing, that it ought to be rejected with abhorrence; unless it should be warranted and required by a divine revelation, which had such degrees of evidence as should be sufficient to over-balance that strong objection against it, which would arise from the considerations we have now been urging. But on this head we need have no apprehension, for I am to shew you,

In the last place; That persecution is so far from being required, or encouraged by the gospel, that it is directly contrary to many of its precepts, and indeed to the whole genius of it.

A Mahometan may perhaps prove from his Koran, that the true faith is to be propagated by the sword, and that heretics and unbelievers are to be cut off or made tributary; but if a christian plead in favour of persecution, while he
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has his New Testament in his hand, in an intelligible language, he must be condemned out of his own mouth. It is condemned by the example of Christ, "who went about doing good, who came "not to destroy men's lives, but to save "them;" who waved the exercise of his miraculous power against his enemies, not only in this instance in the text, but even when they most unjustly and cruelly assaulted him; and never exerted it in one single instance that we read of, to inflict death or any corporal punishment even on those who had most justly deserved it: his doctrine also as well as his example, has taught us "to be harmless "as doves, to love our enemies, to do "good to them that hate us, and to pray "for them that despitefully use us and "persecute us." And will maxims like these allow us to persecute others? When Peter desired leave to smite with the sword, though drawn in so just a cause, Christ commanded him to "put it up in its sheath again;" and he declared before Pilate, that "his kingdom was not of this world;" which he expressly mentions as a reason why he did not arm secular power to plant or to defend it.

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As for the apostles, they declared, agreeably to the example and precepts of their Master, that the power they had received was "for edification and not for destruction;" that "the weapons of their warfare were not carnal, and that the servant of the Lord," the christian minister, "was not to strive, but in meekness to instruct those who opposed themselves." They inculcated it as of the highest importance, that religion must be "a reasonable service, and that bodily exercise," which is the utmost persecution can extort, "profited but little," and was a thing of an entirely different nature from true godliness. "That the strong ought to bear with the infirmities of the weak;" and, in a word, that christians must in the whole of their conversation be harmless, as well as "holy and undefiled, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining amongst them," by these amiable examples, "as lights in the world, and thus holding forth the word of life."

If then persecution in every form and degree be so irrational and culpable a practice, let us be thankful to Almighty God that we are free from the guilt of persecuting

cuting others, and the misery of being persecuted ourselves.

Had we been born in a popish country, education and example might have corrupted our judgment so much that without farther enquiry we might have taken it for granted, as a first principle (as many seem to do) that heretics are to be punished with death. And on this foundation we might have practised or applauded the greatest inhumanities, perhaps towards the best of men. We might have been presenting to God what is much worse than robbery, even murder "for a burnt-offering:" and trusting in that for the expiation of our other offences, which is itself in the number of the greatest enormities which human nature can commit. In such a case I fear the blindness and ignorance of our zeal would not have been allowed as an excuse for its pernicious consequences. St. Paul calls himself the chief of sinners for those severities which he exercised on christians ignorantly, and while he verily thought that it was his duty to "do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

Let us be thankful that we are preserved from that guilt, and let us also

so acknowledge it as an instance of the Divine Goodness to us, that we are not suffering by persecution; that we are not plundered and banished, or perhaps imprisoned and tortured for conscience sake; and so brought under a formidable temptation to make shipwreck of that as well as of faith.

Let us envy none that liberty of conscience which they enjoy, on such equitable principles. While we are free from restraint ourselves, we should be inexcusable if we were displeased that many who most widely differ from us share in the same common benefit. A variety of opinions must be expected, and debates will unavoidably arise from it; but when we are pressed by the arguments of our opponents, or, it may be, provoked by what we think their obstinacy; let us not indulge even a secret wish, that there was a sword in our hand to slay them, or a chain to bind them. Far from complaining of it as an evil, let us rather rejoice in it as the peculiar glory and happiness of our age and country, perhaps beyond any other, that our neighbours, as well as we, enjoy a freedom of chusing their religion for themselves, and amidst all
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the diversity of that choice, "fit every one under his own vine and fig-tree," and have none on that account to "make them afraid."

To conclude; Let us be very cautious that we do not abuse that religious liberty which by the singular favour of Providence, we enjoy. Let us remember, that as the best blessings may be perverted, it is too possible that even this may be turned into licentiousness. It is true, that our consciences are under no human jurisdiction, but let it be considered they are not "without law, but under law, to God." He who searches men's hearts knows how to judge of the sincerity and impartially of our enquiries into truth, though none else can do it.

Let us also remember, that "the servant "who knows his master's will, and prepares not himself according to it, will "be beaten with many stripes." The freest profession of the purest religion on earth will signify nothing, if it be no more than a profession; and all that zeal for liberty which is consistent with being the slave of sin, is only a haughtiness of spirit, which will aggravate a man's guilt rather

rather than extenuate it. God grant
that none of us may reject the truth;
and that none may “hold it in un-
righteousness!”

Sept. 17. On Monday

After this morning I went to the
the house of the old man and
the old man and the old woman

H. B. C. N.

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Sept. 18. On Tuesday

After this morning I went to the

the house of the old man and

the old man and the old woman

H. B. C. N.

Sept. 19. On Wednesday

After this morning I went to the

the house of the old man and

the old man and the old woman

H. B. C. N.

Sept. 20. On Thursday

After this morning I went to the

the house of the old man and

the old man and the old woman

H. B. C. N.

Sept. 21. On Friday

After this morning I went to the

the house of the old man and

S E R M O N VII.

THE NATURE AND EXCELLENCE OF CHARITY.

I CORINTHIANS xiii. 1.

*Though I speak with the tongues of men,
and of angels, and have not charity, I
am become as sounding brags, or a tinkling
cymbal.*

IN this chapter the Apostle has drawn
a most admirable picture of charity :
all the parts of which I propose to consider
distinctly in the ensuing discourse.

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God grant, that while we meditate upon this greatest of all virtues, and view it, as here described, in its nature, properties and high importance, we may be excited to cherish it in our own tempers.

But, first, it may be proper to observe in what manner this encomium upon charity is introduced, and how it stands connected with the foregoing chapter. The apostle, we find, is there discoursing of the abilities, and miraculous powers conferred by the spirit upon those, who embraced the faith of Christ; such as “preaching, prophesying, working miracles, healing the sick, speaking with tongues, and interpreting the scriptures.” He shews, that these several gifts had each their excellence, and conspired in promoting the benefit and edification of the church: nevertheless some of them being useful in a greater, some in a less degree, he exhorts the Corinthians, without despising those that were least useful, earnestly to aspire after such gifts as were the best and most excellent. But, says he, though these talents, and miraculous powers are wonderful in themselves, and being applied as they ought, may enable you to be serviceable to your fellow-christians;

tians; yet, behold I shew you something, which is far more excellent than them, unattended with which they all become contemptible and vain. For, “ though
“ I speak with the tongues of men and of
“ angels, and have not charity, I am be-
“ come as sounding brass, or a tinkling
“ cymbal. And though I have the gift
“ of prophecy, and understand all myste-
“ ries, and all knowledge: and though
“ I have all faith, so that I could remove
“ mountains, and have no charity, I am
“ nothing.” In these verses the Apostle asserts, that spiritual gifts, however extraordinary and wonderful, if they are not accompanied with charity, as they have nothing in them truly excellent, nor are like to render men serviceable to others; so neither will they be of any advantage to such as possess them. And though the supernatural powers to which charity is here expressly preferred, have long since ceased; yet I apprehend the sense of the Apostle may justly be so applied, as to be of use to christians in all ages. For if to speak all languages, by divine inspiration; if to know and foretel what is in futurity; if to be instructed from heaven in those things which are

concealed from the rest of mortals; if to have a faith that is attended with a command over nature, and a power even to remove mountains; if all these extraordinary abilities are unprofitable and vain without charity; much more must that learning, and knowledge, and faith be so, which any christian in these latter days can possibly attain.

In imitation, therefore, of the Apostle, every man living may thus say to himself, Though I could speak a variety of languages with the greatest ease and fluency; though I could express myself in the best manner, and with the most moving eloquence, so that all who hear me should look upon me with astonishment, as something more than mortal, and admire me as an angel come down from heaven: yet, if I am not influenced by charity in the exercise of these talents, they will answer no valuable end, either to myself, or others. As to myself, I shall not be at all the more valuable in the sight of God upon account of them: and while I use them only to procure the applause of men, and not to do them service, there is but little probability that I should obtain an end which I never proposed.

propofed. My eloquence and wit may render me, as it were, an instrument of found, that tinkles in the ear, but leaves no good impreffions on the heart.

And though I had fuch a thorough knowledge of men and things as would enable me to judge probably of future events; though I had travelled through all the regions of fcience, and dived into the mysteries of every art; though I understood whatever is moft obfcure and difficult in nature and religion; though I could difpute with ever fo much learning and ability, and decide aright in every controverfy; though my head abounded with the juftest notions, and my faith was found and orthodox in every point: even all this knowledge and faith would avail me nothing, if in the mean time I wanted the gift of charity.

The Apoftle proceeds in the third verfe, affuring us, that the moft ftriking appearances of liberality and fortitude are worthlefs and vain, when not attended with charity, and animated by it: "Though
" I beftow all my goods to feed the poor,
" and though I deliver my body to be
" burned, and have not charity, it pro-
" fiteth me nothing." From which words

it is evident, that though there may be the greatest profusion of worldly substance, and the highest degree of voluntary suffering, where there is no real charity; yet such bounty, and such sufferings, have nothing in them laudable and excellent, or that will turn to account with regard to our acceptance with God. We commonly term the bare act of giving to the poor, Charity; we may call it Martyrdom, to suffer in the cause of religion upon any principle; but he alone is the truly charitable man, whose hand is opened by the benevolence of his heart: he only is the true martyr, who dies in supporting a religion, out of regard to the welfare of society, and the happiness of mankind which depend upon it.

We may therefore enlarge in the following manner upon the sentiments of the Apostle: If I contribute of my worldly substance to the wants of my fellow-creatures, either to gain a recompence from them, or to feast my vanity upon their applause, or to excite in spectators a good opinion of my generosity; if I relieve the indigent with my whole fortune, upon these principles, and not out of real humanity; I have done nothing, which
God,

God, who knows my heart, will approve. Again, should I express an earnest concern for the spreading of religion, and take ever so much pains to win men over to my own persuasion, not for their sake, but merely to acquire a name for piety and devotion; in the judgment of God, all my labour would be vain, and my zeal fruitless: nay, should I give my body to the flames to manifest my zeal, if this has not charity for its foundation, but ariseth from a spirit of obstinacy, or a desire of being celebrated as a martyr, I shall neither deserve nor receive any reward for my sufferings.

The sacred author having thus observed, that no gifts and abilities, nor the most heroical actions are of any value without charity, proceeds to describe the happy influence of this divine principle on the temper of him, who is inspired by it. And the first amiable property he mentions, is patience in bearing injuries. "Charity suffereth long, and is not easily provoked." The charitable man looks upon himself as nearly allied to all men; and esteems no injuries they may offer to him, sufficient to justify an alienation of mind from them; his anger is kept down by his love for
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those who insult and wrong him. Whatever injuries he receives, though he could avenge himself with ease, yet in no case will he pursue an offender, till he finds it necessary for the good of society, or his own preservation : and while he meditates punishment, he acts not from passion, or a thirst after revenge ; but even from the same calm goodness, which he breathes towards those that never offended him.

Charity "is kind." To do good to men, to spread love and peace, joy and happiness among them, as far as his influence can extend, is equally the business and delight of the charitable man. He considers every opportunity he meets with of obliging another, as a blessing to himself. Not content with performing only those good offices that fall in his way, he contrives how by his counsel, fortune, or personal service he may be most useful to mankind around him ; he attends to their circumstances, and suits himself to the state of their affairs ; advising the perplexed, instructing the ignorant, comforting the afflicted, relieving the indigent, and assisting his friends according to his ability. Nor does he confine his kindness to those who are connected with him by the ties of intimacy

intimacy or blood. That you are a man, that you are in want, that he is able to serve you without omitting any duty of greater moment, are sufficient pleas to engage in your behalf his generous aid. In short, the only reason why he does not make every human creature happy, is because he cannot.

Charity "envieth not:" The charitable man is a proof against that ill-natured pain which little minds feel, when they see others out-stripping them in any accomplishment. If such as were behind overtake him, equal, or get before him in the race of life, he can pray sincerely, that God would speed them: when his neighbour exceeds him in ability or fortune, he becomes at least his equal in excellence, by rejoicing in all his advantages. Though he could wish his own defects and calamities removed; yet to see his superiors brought down to a level with him, would be far from affording him any satisfaction. He observes their miscarriages with a generous concern, and is relieved, under his own disappointments, by the pleasure he takes in beholding their success. Thus envy and charity are directly opposite in their nature and properties; for envy delights in

the evil, and grieves at the good of its neighbour; charity, on the other hand, is pleased with his happiness, and grieved when evil befalls him.

Charity “vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.” He who is governed by this principle neither entertains himself, nor endeavours to create in others extravagant ideas of his own dignity. Observing the weakness of mankind to be such, that most men are dissatisfied when they see themselves out-done in advantages of mind, body, or fortune; he is not forward to display, or magnify his superiority over them in any respect: he rather seems to shrink down, as it were, to a level with his inferiors, and hide from them those advantages, the sight of which could answer no other end, but to put them out of conceit with themselves, and their own condition. Hence he supplies the poor, hardly appearing to take notice of their poverty; and instructs the ignorant without upbraiding them with their defects, or setting off his own superior wisdom. He esteems no mortal below his regard, because Heaven has placed him far below him in rank and fortune: on the contrary, he makes every man, whom vice and guilt has not debased, his brother

ther and equal, as far as is consistent with the necessary distinctions of human society. He is of too high a spirit to look upon any office, as dishonourable to him, by which he can be of real service to the meanest of those, who are the sons of God, and the brethren of Christ.

And being thus free from pride, he is, upon that account, the less liable to "be-
"have himself unseemly:" for, moderately speaking, one half of the indecencies men are guilty of in their conversation and commerce with each other, are owing to arrogance, vanity, and conceit; from all which, charity is secured by that modesty and humility which always attends it. And though a benevolent man may not be so perfect in those outward forms of good breeding, which have no foundation in nature, but depending wholly on fancy and custom, are infinitely various in different times and places; yet his unaffected good nature, and the uprightness of his heart, make ample amends for these trifling failures.

Charity "seeketh not her own, but the advantage of others." Some, when they are doing good, are all the while looking at themselves, and consulting on-

ly their own reputation or worldly interest: they put on the appearance, that they may gain the fame of virtue; and that, by means of the esteem it procures them, they may advance themselves in the world with the greater ease and security: but the charitable man is an entire stranger to this kind of policy; he is too honest to deceive, too wise to be crafty and cunning; he does good to men, purely because he loves them, and would be satisfied with the generous act, though no recompence were to follow it, besides the consciousness of his own virtue. If the fruit of his charity is useful and good to others, his end is answered, his whole design compleatly finished. Charity, like the sun, warms and blesses the world with its influence, equally keeping its course, and shining on, whether mankind praise or revile it.

The next property the Apostle ascribes to charity; that it "is not easily provoked," I have considered already: and proceed with him to observe, that it "thinketh no evil." Love fills the breast of the charitable man, and leaves no room there for treachery, fraud, and malicious intentions. He never attempts to deceive his

his neighbour to his prejudice, and will not take advantage of his ignorance to enrich himself at his cost. You may securely entrust your affairs in his hands; for he will no more wrong you, if he has opportunity of doing it in thick darkness and the deepest secrecy, than when he acts in the sight of a croud. He never deliberates about a mean action, and is so far from committing injustice, that he would no sooner think of doing it, than of attempting the most impossible thing in nature.

Again; the charitable man "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." He takes no satisfaction in observing the faults and miscarriages of others; but is glad when he sees them excel in wisdom and virtue. Their laudable conduct affords him greater delight than malice conceives at the slips of her enemies: nor are the envious more sincerely grieved at the excellencies of those, against whom their envy is directed, than he is at the failings of those he loves: he frankly gives to all men the praise that is due to their merit, and is not forward to publish the faults of any.

This leads me to the next words, which are in our translation, "beareth all

all things;” but ought to have been rendered, “covereth all things:” the same word in the original being used here, and doubtless with the same intention as in 1 Peter iv. 8. “Charity will cover a multitude of sins.” Unless when it would answer some good end, the charitable man will not reveal the imperfections of his neighbour; in all other cases he will industriously hide them, and be as cautious of exposing his character, as of lessening his own. As he does not indulge himself, so neither will he encourage others, in venting slander and detraction, by listening to their censures with greediness and pleasure. On the contrary, he will endeavour to silence them by a cold reception, or by openly expressing a dislike to such insinuations. When malice attacks a man’s fame in his absence, either with falsehood or truth, he generously appears in his defence; and either vindicates him from false aspersions, or in the best manner he can, excuses and palliates what cannot be denied.

Charity “believeth all things, hopeth all things.” Persons of dark and malicious natures are forward to entertain mean sentiments of all around them: they measure others by themselves; and being
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sensible of little or no excellence in their own tempers, they can scarce believe there is any virtue in the world. Hence they abound with groundless distrust and jealousy, put the worst construction it will bear on the behaviour of others, and are ready to condemn all men as knaves and hypocrites. On the other hand, a generous, honest man is apt to believe and hope the best of all men, and expects to find that goodness abroad, which he feels at home. Conscious of sincerity in his own behaviour, he wonders if the world can be so bad as is often represented, and frankly ascribes to worthy principles every practice that bears a promising appearance. He esteems it more eligible to err on the favourable, than on the severe side; and would choose to think better than they deserve of many, rather than to injure one good man in his judgment concerning him.

Lastly; "Charity endureth all things."

Fervent love to mankind inspires the noblest and most resolute courage. It enables a man chearfully to undergo pain, hardship, disgrace, and death itself, in serving his generation. Such was its influence upon this great Apostle,

Apostle, who seems to have distinguished himself above the rest of heavenly spirits, by receiving into his soul an overflowing portion of benevolence. When he saw bonds and afflictions waiting for him in every place, yet none of these things moved him; neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might promote the spread of the gospel, and thereby the happiness of mankind. Thus does Charity form the hero, and the martyr; and every other human character that is truly great and illustrious.

The Apostle having thus enumerated the lovely properties and blessed effects of charity; to crown all, he adds, "that it never faileth." After it has adorned the life of a good man here, it shall not desert him at death; but shall enter into heaven with him, and be a principal ingredient in his happiness and perfection to all eternity. Upon this account, it infinitely excels all other gifts and abilities. As to prophecy, it will perish as fast as events come forward; the use of language will be at an end, when our new being commences; and the search, which we here call, knowledge, will terminate

terminate in what will be really such. All these excellencies, which do but lead to the arrival of what is more perfect, will necessarily have an end, when we shall come to that perfection.

As the understanding of a child is improved by receiving notices of things which contribute to his good conduct when a man; but, though then necessary, are thrown aside when he is arrived at manhood: so do all the good arts of this life contribute towards our obtaining perfection in another; but, after we shall come into that future being, will cease to be useful. As long as we stay in this world, we are all of us mere children in wisdom: and as a man grown up to maturity despises the sentiments of his childhood; so we, when we have attained the true maturity of our being, shall reflect upon that knowledge, which now is so apt to make us vain, as trivial and contemptible.

At present, truth is hard to be found; the faculties we employ in the search of it, are fallible and weak; and many intermediate obstacles prevent our clear perception of divine things: but when we shall arrive in the world of light, all these

these difficulties will vanish, and we shall know the most sublime truths with as much familiarity and certainty as we do now each others' faces: then shall faith be lost in vision, and hope in enjoyment; but charity shall still abide.

Of these three therefore, charity is, beyond dispute, the most excellent; forasmuch as faith and hope, as soon as they shall have assisted us in obtaining eternal bliss, will immediately vanish and die away. Whereas charity not only is a necessary preparation for immortal happiness, but also makes a principal part of it, and lives for ever with it.

Thus we have followed the Apostle in describing the excellencies of this divine principle. From what has been said, let us learn, first, to guard against the error into which the Corinthians were fallen, who, seem to have been so transported with the admiration of spiritual gifts, as to have overlooked and neglected Charity, the best and most valuable of all endowments. I am afraid we are many of us too apt to prefer the abilities of the head to the goodness of the heart, in our judgments both concerning others and ourselves. If we find a man possessed of a considerable

nable share of wit and knowledge, if he appears to have a large acquaintance with divine and human things, if he can also express himself with a ready and graceful eloquence; this we admire as an extraordinary man: and yet, if this extraordinary man be void of charity, he is nothing before God; and his superior talents may only qualify him for doing the greater mischief in society. His wit and eloquence may perhaps be employed in pleasing mankind to their own hurt, in order to gain profit or honour to himself; in overbearing the modest, abusing the innocent, defending injustice, propagating falshood, or riveting upon men the chains of slavery or superstition. In this case he is worse than nothing, and, in the sight of God, infinitely inferior to any charitable man that, with common understanding, sincerely endeavours to serve mankind, and do all the good he can in the world.

We may observe hence, in the second place, that faith alone is not sufficient to salvation. Too many seem to lay the whole stress of religion upon a right belief; and are persuaded, that if their faith be sound and orthodox, nothing more is
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necessary to secure the favour of God, and eternal life : but here you have the word of an inspired Apostle for it, that if you have all faith, so that you could remove mountains, and have no charity, you are nothing.

Again ; When we are assured by the Apostle himself, that the greatest knowledge in this world is but seeing through a glass darkly ; (and we must all own, that we have but faint glimmerings and earnest of better understanding hereafter) how can it possibly enter into the heart of a christian to be inflamed with rage towards other christians for differing from him in points of religion ? The wisest among us cannot say, that the difference between him and his brother, is between the knowing and the ignorant ; and not between two persons who quarrel, because they are not in the same error. It was therefore justly said to a warm man, who, being in dispute with one that dissented from him, called him heretic ; “ the worst of all heretics is the uncharitable man.”

But, lastly, the best use we can make of what has been said, is, that we be each of us persuaded to cultivate Charity
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in our own tempers. Let us see what improvement we have made in this excellent virtue, by considering what influence it has upon our minds and actions. To be satisfied I have it in a due degree, it is not sufficient that I dispense of my fortune to the indigent; for this I may do out of ostentation and vanity: it concerns me therefore to examine, whether I am liberal, not from these mean principles, but from sincere benevolence? Am I patient when I am offended, and have power to be avenged? Am I free from envy, where I am excelled by such as I can never equal? Am I free from vanity, for the little good of which I am conscious I am possessed? Am I unaffected, and from pure good-will obliging to all the world? Am I more solicitous to do men good, than to please them, and be admired by them? Do not I arrogate too much to myself? Am I not moved with slight provocations, and apt to entertain just suspicions? Do I never rejoice in men's faults, and miscarriages? Am I more apt to be pleased with their virtues and perfections? When I can suffer hardships, and cheerfully endure calamities, for the sake of my fellow-creatures,

tures, I am endued with charity. If I am possessed of this, I am master of that which will last for ever: if I am destitute of it, though my knowledge be ever so extensive, my faith sound, and my hope confident; all these will be unprofitable to me; my faith and knowledge at last will avail me nothing, and my hope vanish in despair.

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S E R M O N VIII.

ON THE FRAILTY OF HUMAN NATURE.

ISAIAH XL. 6.

All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.

THERE are only three ways of thinking upon death, the unavoidable eclipse and decay of all human glory, excellence, and felicity, and they are these; with terror, indifference, or use. To think of this determined crisis
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and period with terror is fruitless and unavailing, because the established laws of nature will take their course. It argues a weak mind too much captivated and enslaved by passion, and in which the voice of reason, and the dictates of religion, are not allowed their due weight and influence. It spreads an habitual sullen gloom within, which aggravates misfortunes, and renders the real comforts of life insipid. It enervates resolution, damps activity, prevents our consulting, and attending regularly to, our own advantage, and cheerfully pursuing the good of others; and, of consequence, renders us a torment to ourselves, and an affliction and burden to our friends around us. On the other hand, to think of these things with indifference is the sure mark of a stupid insensible temper, on which the most solemn and important events can make no impression. For even on the dull sceptical scheme, which degrades the nature and rank of man into that of a mere animal, all the little happiness which we can either enjoy or hope for, must sink and vanish at death: but if there be a future state of immortality, our risk upon changing

ing our post, and shifting the scene of being, must be infinite. The terrifying views of death are not, therefore, more pusillanimous and distracting, than an unconcerned and careless frame is rash and trifling: the first implies too quick and deep a sense; the latter that we are either so thoughtless, or so hardened, as to have no inward feeling; the one supposes no strength, the other no exercise of reason. But if we make a just improvement of the frailty, vanity, and uncertainty of human life in every condition, however elate and splendid, flushed with health, crowned with plenty, decorated with honours, admired and envied by the superficial thinker, or more fitly beloved and respected for the amiable qualities which adorn it; we then act a discreet and manly part, move properly in our sphere, and in concert with the design of Infinite Wisdom; we take the most effectual method to arm ourselves against the inexorable rigor of our fate, and to check all exorbitant inclinations.

The most useful reflections of mankind are those which are employed about the plainest subjects, that need no proof, but are evident to sense and experience. A-

mong these must be ranked, as claiming and deserving a chief place at all times, the universal vanity of the present life of man, and instability of all inferior enjoyments. By this our duty is most strongly enforced; and it is the only ground on which we can frame a solid idea, or successful pursuit of happiness. The reflections, which this subject affords, are not restrained to particular circumstances and characters, to a peculiar station, complexion, or temper, or to any private views, but concern the whole human species. And in all cases which are so obvious, and of general importance, the world does not need to be convinced of the truth of principles, but only to be directed how to reason upon them, and led into a right train of thinking. This will be fully illustrated, by confining ourselves to the instance, which the text suggests. The transitory possession, and fading lustre, of all the goodliness of mortal man, of all worldly felicity and honour, are points universally acknowledged. It would be thought madness to dispute, and ridiculous to attempt to prove them. But that they are not properly considered, is as clear, as that the facts themselves are certain

certain and unquestionable: for if they were, their influence must appear visibly in correcting the irregular fallies of wild and impetuous passion, and in the fruits of equanimity, moderation, and well regulated affections, in fervent uninterrupted offices of piety, and the discipline of a strict and cautious virtue. And the prophet has, therefore, represented God himself as commanding him to proclaim, not for the information of mankind, or the discovery of a new truth, but to engage their attention to a principle allowed in theory, but shamefully neglected with respect to its practical consequences, though of everlasting moment, that “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.”

By “all flesh,” in the text, is intended the race of mankind, who are with the strictest accuracy, characterised by that title, when their animal propensions, and the weakness and frailty of their external frame are particularly described: and by “the goodliness thereof,” we are to understand the perfections that adorn human nature, that render it amiable, or venerable, as communicating a real grace, or dignity; together with those things

which are reputed to be its most eminent distinctions, all its imaginary glories and privileges. These are represented as liable to fade and wither, like the "verdure of grass, and the flower of the field," whose beauties no sooner appear in their full bloom, than they begin to sicken and decline. I shall give a brief specimen of the reflections, that will naturally arise in the mind, with respect to the most valued accomplishments and honours in both the kinds I have mentioned, the real and fantastical; and then conclude with a few more general remarks arising from the text. In no part of which proposed discourse is it my design to paint the horrors of death, or describe abasing and mortifying scenes, any further than it is necessary to restrain wantonness and levity, and inspire true discretion, and lasting sentiments of piety.

In the first place, then, nothing verifies so clearly and fully the observation in the text, that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness of it as the flower of the field;" nothing shews so undeniably that the emblems are exactly just and pertinent, as the many instances we meet with

with of mortality in the dawn as it were of rational life, when nature is scarce ripened, when we think ourselves just entered on the grand theatre of the world, and a departure out of it is least feared, and most lamented. When death executes his awful commission, what becomes of the presumption, sprightliness, and pride of youth? Where is that enterprising spirit, that forward heat of resolution, that ardor of pursuit, that vivacity and life in action, for which this age is so peculiarly remarkable? Where are its amusements of vanity, its delight in gay ostentation, or its fond enjoyment of pleasure? All lost in deep and solemn silence, and never to be revived. Let youth learn the proper lesson from hence, not to be over-confident, but modest and considerate; not to be licentious, and indulge the luxuriancies of fancy and appetite, but to act with prudence and virtue. Let the warmth of their tempers be cooled by reflection, and their high flow of animal spirits be reduced by a due mixture of sedateness and gravity.

Young persons are, generally, most averse to solemn contemplations of death and judgment: they are apt to regard

them as objects of terror, which are ill-suited to the sprightliness peculiar to their stage of life, which damp its vigor, and contract the circle of its pleasures. And as in this light humour of putting away far from them, what they are inclined to call, "the evil day," they run the hazard of being "cut down like a flower" in the midst of their licentious follies, and in a state of impenitence, since "every man at his best estate is altogether vanity;" I would earnestly recommend it to them to consider, that were these, to which their heedlessness and levity make them so strongly reluctant, really gloomy and disconsolate reflections, they would notwithstanding be absolutely necessary, because the schemes of God's moral providence are fixed and unalterable; and the future judgment of mankind is an event ~~of~~ the less certain, or the less important, for not being duly and deliberately weighed. If we survey our own frame, by which we are distinguished as men, we shall find ourselves formed reasonable and voluntary, and consequently moral and accountable beings; we shall find also, engraven upon our hearts, a law

a law or rule of action, which must proceed from the eternal Maker and Sovereign of the world. And to suppose that he takes no notice of the conduct of his creatures and subjects, represents him as having no regard to the order and harmony, nor indeed to the happiness of the moral creation; and is therefore quite unsuitable to his wisdom and goodness, in both the characters in which he stands related to them, of Father, and Governor. And consequently, since there are ~~not~~ in the present state, no certain marks of strict and equal retribution, but that seeming disorder and irregularity, arising from a promiscuous communication of good and evil, which might fairly be expected in a state of trial; we have the utmost reason to conclude that there is a future life, in which rewards and punishments will be duly and unexceptionably administered. What good end therefore can it answer to be inconsiderate and careless about it? Or if, in the heat of our youthful spirits, we can prevail with ourselves to banter and ridicule it as an idle enthusiastic fiction; will insolence, or levity of wit, alter eternal reason, or annul the deter-

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minations of the supremely wise and almighty Deity? Or can it in the least diminish the natural terrors of that awful day, when the fate of the whole world will be judicially decided?

What I have hitherto said is upon a case merely fictitious, and supposed in order to enforce the argument more strongly; that the future judgment is, indeed, a melancholy and gloomy prospect: but it is only so accidentally, or according to the character of the person who reflects upon it, and not in itself. For that we are moral and accountable is, in truth, the distinction and honour of our frame. It inspires refined views, and leads to great and laudable actions. Whereas, if our existence is to determine with the present life, which is generally conceived to be the case with respect to mere animal beings, our estimate of the dignity and value of human nature must sink very low; and it would be no wonder, if such groveling apprehensions debased our taste, and we aimed at nothing higher than the indulgences of brutal life. Nothing can be a more enlivening and comfortable reflection to an honest mind than this, that its integrity will be tried
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and rewarded by unerring rectitude, wisdom and goodness. The thought does not in the least interfere with the regular, but only with the wild and hurtful, pleasures of youth: and it has a direct tendency to put a stop to those criminal excesses, which are the surest ground of melancholy ideas and inward horror. What I have now offered is not intended to persuade young persons to seclude themselves from the world, and affect a reserved, formal, unsocial behaviour; but only, while they are engaged in the pursuit of pleasure, or amused by innocent or useful entertainments, not to deprive themselves of the more substantial delights of virtue and piety, not to forget that they are ~~the~~ moral creatures and subjects of the eternal God, and accountable to his supreme tribunal.

Let us now direct our view to another part of the dark scene of death, and we shall see the great and honourable stripped of all the proud spoils of their ambition, of all the ornaments and trophies of their dignity, and mixed in the common ruin. Power indeed may be lost, and temporary honours fade, by means of innumerable accidents, before the course of hu-

man life is completed: but if they meet with no shocks of this kind, and preserve their splendor and influence undiminished, what an inconsiderable and trifling space is there, before, by an inevitable necessity, they must suffer a total and eternal eclipse! From whence we learn, that all the several forms and elevations of human grandeur, abstracted from the influence which they may have, under a wise conduct, and animated by a refined spirit, to procure the good of others, are mere useless pomp, and not in the least desirable; and that ambition is an unnatural ferment, a distempered passion, whose cravings are irregular and insatiable, which can yield only an imaginary gratification, and serve but to render our loss and disgrace more conspicuous, when we are brought down from our height, and forced to submit to the general lot of mankind. Nothing has a more evident tendency, to check the impatient sallies of a vain aspiring mind, than such thoughts and meditations as these. Nothing is more fitly adapted to kill the seeds of envy, and prevent their rising to a malignant and tormenting habit. For as the present scene of our existence is so very
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soon terminated, the difference there is between the several stations in it, provided that the necessities and real conveniences of life are enjoyed, is in itself so inconsiderable, as to be below provoking our envy, and utterly undeserving of our solicitous pursuit. Especially since that true greatness is in some degree attainable by all, which consists in generous views and a noble benevolence of temper, in a contempt of flattery and mean compliances, and an uniform uncorrupted probity of heart and manners.

Again; When we see that wisdom and virtue, themselves, which are the chief goodliness and glory of a man, are no guard or defence against death, and consequently, that his best and most valuable enjoyments here are not to be depended upon as to their present influence and use; this will engage us in a new train of reflections, and, in some measure, of a different kind from what we have already pursued; because wisdom and goodness are not mere nominal accomplishments, but real excellencies, which confer honour on the person who is possessed of them, and give him a proper title and right to our esteem. They are the most worthy

and beautiful delineations of Deity that can be expressed in created nature. They must therefore be grossly disparaged by being put upon the same level with arbitrary titles, worldly dignities, health, youth, or any other external and variable distinctions; which do not in the least raise or depress a man's natural and intrinsic worth. Here then is a lecture of humility addressed directly to our reason, to the higher and more refined faculty of human nature: we are taught not to rely on any thing that is to be found in man, but to repose our firm and ultimate confidence in God alone. In short, we should consider all our opportunities for making a proficiency in knowledge and virtue (since they are in their own nature so absolutely uncertain) as opportunities to be hastily and diligently improved, that we may answer the chief purpose of our being here, and raise our souls to the joys of immortality: nay, that by the eminency of our wisdom and goodness we may not barely gain an admittance into the kingdom of heaven, but be distinguished, and stand high in honour, among the inhabitants of those glorious and blissful regions.

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Thus have I applied the observation in the text, which indeed is no other than a plain incontestable appearance in the universal course of nature, to some of the principal real, or supposed, instances of perfection, goodliness, and honour, which mankind enjoy; and shewn distinctly, what uses do naturally spring from each. I have aimed in this part of my discourse at nothing curious, but intended from the beginning, without art or affectation, to insist only on those plain topics or heads of reflection, which are found by experience, to be most universally striking and efficacious. The subject without any strain of invention or pomp of words, has energy and weight enough to recommend and enforce itself. I now proceed to make a few more general remarks, obviously suggested by the text.

And the first is, that it appears from what has been said, that all mankind are placed by the God of nature, very nearly in a state of equality. In their infant-state they are equally tender and incapable of providing for themselves; they are liable to the same passions, to the same decays and disorders of the animal frame; and their ex-
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it, or departure out of this world, is with the same dismal formalities, and attended by the same natural agonies and terrors of death. So that in the most substantial points they are upon a level; and their differences of condition are either by accident, or by their own choice, or only in opinion. The ties, by which they are bound to cultivate for each other common benevolence and friendship, are founded on their very constitution and original state, and consequently indissoluble: and their accidental distinctions ought never to break asunder, or in the minutest degree to relax, the bonds of nature, and can therefore afford no reasonable ground for haughtiness, indifference, or mutual aversion.

But, secondly, from the views which have now been exhibited of the universally weak and uncertain condition of human life, we may not only presume, but raise an argument of great probability, that there is a future state of existence intended and ordained for man. For, can it enter into our thoughts, that man, who is endued with such noble powers, and capable of such high perfection, was intended, by the great Creator,

ator, to be confined to this narrow and imperfect scene of action? Is it agreeable to our ideas of God's infinite goodness to suppose, that he was made for no higher purpose than to struggle, for a small space, with the inconveniences of this uncertain and vexatious world, and then entirely to lose his existence? Is he not, considered in this light, the most perplexed and inexplicable part of the creation? Does he appear with a dignity becoming a rational nature, formed after the resplendent image of the Deity? Or can it be imagined, that those good men, who have led a life of most laboriously useful virtue, and who besides groaning under the common pressures of mortality, have been exposed to reproaches and persecutions for conscience sake; can it, I say, be imagined, that they have here, in this first short dawn of intelligent being, this state of unstable fluctuating happiness, received all their reward? These things are manifestly absurd, disparaging in the utmost degree to the honour and excellence of human nature, as well as injurious to the perfections of its glorious Author: they therefore plainly point out to us a futurity, designed to be
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the consummation of the rational life of man, and the seat and center of his happiness.

In the last place; It is well worth our observing, that both the wisdom and goodness of God are eminently displayed, in the vanity and uncertainty which are inscribed on every age, and every station of the present life without exception; because, by this constitution, what is equally the concern of all, to aspire after a more sure and permanent felicity, is equally inculcated upon all. The wise man is not cooled and slackened in his acquisitions of knowledge; nor the religious or virtuous man in his close and intense pursuit of greater degrees of moral rectitude. The rich and great have no plausible colour of an excuse for their pride and oppression, and being immersed in indolence and luxury; nor those, who are in the flower and vigor of their age, for being devoted to vanity, and utterly unmindful of God: but the lesson of Solomon may be applied to every one without distinction, who is arrived to the due exercise of reason; "Hear the
" conclusion of the whole matter, fear
" God,

“God, and keep his commandments;
“for this is the whole of man.” There-
fore, delay not one moment, in an affair
of such unspeakable, such infinite im-
portance.

S E R M O N IX.

ON SELF-GOVERNMENT.

PROVERBS xvi. 32.

*He that is slow to anger, is better than
the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit,
than he that taketh a city.*

THESE words are a just commendation of self-government, and represents this domestic jurisdiction as more great and excellent than all foreign rule, and external authority and power. And
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this commendation is so much the more remarkable, as it comes from one who wanted none of this external power and authority ; and therefore cannot be supposed to disparage it upon that account. He was one of the greatest and most powerful princes, and had in his power all the means of raising himself and subduing his enemies ; but as he made wisdom his first and chief request to God, so he both valued and possessed it in a greater degree than other men. This enabled him to pass a right judgment upon things, and esteem them not according to their outward appearance, or the opinion the world had of them, but according to their own native worth and intrinsic value.

Of this we have an instance in the text. For what is there in the common opinion of the world, and to all outward appearance, more excellent and desirable than great power and dominion, and, which is the natural consequence of these, victory and success over those who rise up against us ? Is not this esteemed a great happiness ? Does not this gain men credit and reputation, and make them courted and admired ? And yet there is another

another sort of power, which, though not so conspicuous, nor attended with so much noise and shew, is more truly great than this, and renders those who have it more excellent. There is another victory, which, though of a more private nature, secret and silent, is yet more difficult, and of greater consequence than this. What this is, the words of the wise man will tell us: "He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city."

That rule which the wise man here recommends, is in general the full command and government of ourselves; the entire conquest not only of our anger, but of all our passions and affections. For what is at first expressed by being "slow to anger," is afterwards more fully explained by "ruling our spirit." From whence it is evident, that this victory is not to be confined to the single passion of anger, but is to be extended to all others, to love and hatred, desire, joy, hope and fear, envy, sorrow, despair, and the like. The government of all these is included in "ruling our spirit;" nor shall we ever be able to "rule our spirit," without the govern-

government and command of all our passions; because any one of them is sufficient to disturb and disquiet our spirits, and deprive us of the free use and exercise of our rational faculties, and the full possession and enjoyment of ourselves.

When therefore Solomon here speaks of one that is "slow to anger, and ruleth his spirit;" he plainly means, one who has the entire command of himself, and the government of all his passions, and has brought them under subjection to his reason: one, whose judgment is not blinded, nor his will perverted by any vicious appetite, so as to be imposed upon by false appearances, and either judge that to be good which is really evil, or chuse evil when he knows what is good: one, who keeps strictly to the order of nature, and lets that principle which is sovereign in him, have the sole rule and dominion over him, and makes his inferior appetites and passions obey the superior conduct of reason and judgment: one, who does not carry his resentments of any injury beyond the rules of justice or decorum; who fixes bounds to his desires, and does not permit them to wander without end or measure: who
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can command his fears, and keep them from multiplying imaginary dangers, or enhancing real ones at the expence of his duty and conscience: who can bring his hopes to the standard of reason, and not suffer his fancy to extend them further than there is ground for expectation.

In a word; The man that is meek and merciful, calm and gentle, dispassionate and unprejudiced, inflexibly good and virtuous, is the person here intended by Solomon. "He that is thus slow to anger, is better than the mighty: and he that," in all these instances, "ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city."

With what truth and justice the preference is given to this man, is now to be considered. And this will fully appear, if it can be shown that self-government is in itself more great and excellent, and is attended with more beneficial consequences than any rule or dominion over others.

To prove the excellence of this dominion, considered in itself, I observe, first, that it is an argument of greater power.

The

The power of a rational being does not consist in mere external force; but in the vigour and strength of the mind, and the power which it has over the inferior appetites and passions. Therefore, the man that is addicted to any unruly lust or passion; that is transported, for instance, by anger, to acts of cruelty and revenge; is not a man of power, but is really weak, feeble, and impotent. He may have others under his power, and at his command, but he has no power or command over himself; nor is he at his own disposal, but as much under the tyranny of his passions, as those whom he persecutes and oppresses. And where is the difference between our being under the power of other men's passions, or our own? Is not the one as great a weakness as the other? Is it not a greater weakness to be ourselves enslaved to that, by which we make slaves of others?

There is therefore no power comparable to that which we exercise over ourselves; and no greater proof of this power, than patience, forbearance, and long-suffering.

As

As this is the true power of a rational being, and is upon that account preferable to all external rule and government, and in itself more excellent; so it is a greater argument of true wisdom and discretion.

All passion implies, not only weakness and impotency, but the greatest folly and indiscretion. And never any man did that in a passion, which he would justify afterwards, nay which he would not inwardly condemn, and, if he had any ingenuity, openly confess to be wrong, and ask pardon for it.

For what we do in a passion, is always done without reason, and for the most part against it. Reason at such times, is never heard or hearkened to, never consulted or advised with; and then it is no wonder that the action is foolish, and such as we are ashamed of. And therefore a wise man will be afraid to expose himself to any passion or provocation; because, before he is thus transported, he has himself in his own hands, and enjoys the free use of his reason; but after he is provoked, he is not sure of himself, nor can he tell how far he shall be at his own disposal. For passion is a short fit of

VOL. V. I madness;

madness; and if we suffer ourselves to be overtaken with it, there is nothing so foolish, and extravagant, but we may be guilty of, while we continue in that state.

And can we think that man wise and discreet, who rules and governs others, but has no manner of command over himself: who has subdued his enemies, and extended his conquests far and wide, but has not conquered any one lust or passion, nor enlarged the freedom of his own mind, but has left himself in a more wretched and miserable condition at home, than his enemies are abroad?

It is certain that every man's self is more nearly related, and of greater concern to him, than all the world besides: and wisdom as well as charity ought to begin at home, though it should not end there. "If thou be wise" (says Solomon) "thou shalt be wise for thyself."

It is impossible for men not to love themselves; and self-love in a true sense, is an argument of great wisdom; there can however be no true wisdom without it. No man will ever think himself wise, who is extremely busy and solicitous about

bout other peoples affairs, while he neglects and overlooks his own; who is continually troubling himself about what passes abroad, and never looks at home, but suffers all there to run to ruin: who affects to have authority and dominion over others, but apprehends no necessity of ruling his own spirit, and keeping his passions under due subjection and restraint. And yet this is certainly the truest wisdom, in the account of God as well as man. "The discretion of man deferreth his anger, and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." "He that is slow to anger, is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly." "He that hath knowledge spareth his words; and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit."

This private rule over our own spirits, and government of our passions, is also an argument of more courage, and true greatness of mind; than the largest conquests over others, and the most celebrated achievements in war.

The conquering and subduing others, is sometimes nothing else but the effect of so much superior strength, as leaves no room at all for courage, but is rather

an instance of cowardice. At other times, it is performed by inconsiderate heat and fierce rage, and shews the greatness of our passion rather than our courage. For true courage is always accompanied with consideration, and goes upon fixed and steady principles. And therefore the man that upon mature deliberation with himself, and a thorough conviction of the great beauty and excellency of virtue, and the deformity and baseness of vice, the great reasonableness of justice and mercy, temperance and chastity, and the great unreasonableness of cruelty and oppression, pride, covetousness, and excess, and considering the obligations he is under to practise these virtues, and abstain from the contrary vices : I say, the man that upon such considerations and principles as these, resolves to wage war with himself, and overcome all those passions which rise up in opposition to his religious designs, and would divert him from a steady course of virtue, and draw him into any sinful or foolish action ; and does actually keep his ground, and maintain his integrity, his meekness, and temper, and moderation, amidst all the allurements to sin, and provocations to anger and passion ;

sion ; shows more true courage and greatness of mind, than he that conquers the greatest and most powerful nations. The one is the effect of settled principles, and mature deliberation ; the other frequently of sudden heat, and hasty passion, ambition and vain-glory, anger, cruelty, and revenge. Upon these accounts, this private rule and government over ourselves and our own passions, is, in itself, more truly great and excellent than any external dominion and power which we acquire over others.

I proceed now to show that this rule over a man's self and his own spirit, is attended with greater and more beneficial consequences, than any external rule and power ; than the conquering nations, and subduing kingdoms.

And here we may observe, that the ruling our own spirits, and the right government of our passions, would in a great measure destroy the necessity of external conquest and dominion ; and better secure all the ends of civil government, than the force of arms, and the power of the sword.

Though war be in itself never so just and necessary for our security and de-

fence ; yet it must be owned to be a necessary evil. And though victory and success against the unjust attempts of our enemies, be confessedly great blessings ; yet it were certainly more desirable not to want them ; as it is a better state to live without enemies, than to be at the trouble of subduing them.

Indeed there is scarcely any consideration so melancholy, as the absolute necessity there is of wars and public desolations, as well as the inflicting death and imprisonment and other punishments upon private persons, for restraining violence and oppression, and securing the peace, and quiet, and good order of the world : that mankind should be sunk into such a degenerate state, as like beasts of prey to worry and devour one another, and not be kept in any tolerable bounds, but by such severe and cruel usage : that so many lives must be sacrificed for the preservation of others ; such desolation and destruction brought upon the face of the earth, and such a scene of blood and slaughter ; and this often out of absolute necessity, and for the security of every thing that is dear and valuable to us : that men must be hired to sheath their swords
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in one anothers bowels, and resolutely destroy those whom they never knew or saw before, and therefore cannot be supposed to have any personal hatred or enmity against them.

These and many other reflections, which are very obvious, give us a melancholy representation of human nature. All this is truly deplorable; and the more it is so, the greater recommendation is it of that which would effectually remedy all these evils and disorders.

Now this would be effectually accomplished, were every man to maintain a constant rule over his own spirit, and the due government of his passions. For it is nothing else but want of this self-government, and of keeping peace at home within our own breasts, that is the occasion of all the confusions and disorders which happen abroad in the world.

From "whence come wars and fightings among you?" (says the Apostle)
"come they not hence, even of your lusts,
"that war in your members? Ye lust
"and have not: ye kill, and desire to
"have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and
"war, yet ye have not, because ye ask
"not: ye ask, and receive not, because

“ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts,” This is the true cause of all these evils. And if men would but apply themselves diligently to the ruling their own spirits, and regulating the inward motions and desires of their souls: if instead of affecting to have rule and dominion over others, they would make it their business to get the entire command and mastery over themselves; if instead of being hasty to revenge injuries, they would be slow to anger, and ready to forgive: if instead of giving way to ambition, and striving to enlarge their territories, and increase their possessions, they would confine their desires, and learn to be meek and lowly, and content with such things as they have: I say, if men could but once be brought to this, then would wars cease in the world: then would all private injuries and offences be removed; there would be no acts of violence and oppression, and no complaining in our streets.

This too would in a great measure supersede the use of magisterial power, of civil rule and authority. For one main end of all this is, to govern those who cannot or will not govern themselves; to keep

keep those under terror, and in due subjection, who have not the rule of their own spirits, and the command of themselves. So that if this art of governing ourselves was more studied and practised, there would not be so much use and so great necessity of political rule and authority, especially of those severe laws which are made for the restraint of wickedness. "For the law is not made for a "righteous man, but for the lawless and "disobedient," for those who have no manner of self-government, no rule or command over their own spirits; to suppress those irregular motions, from whence all those evil works proceed, to which the laws were designed to be a terror and a punishment.

The consequence therefore of this government of our spirits, would be very great and beneficial; the world would soon be sensible of the good effects of it, and be freed from most of those troubles and confusions which now so much disturb us, and make our lives so miserable and uneasy. So that, in the issue, it is as much above all external power, all public rule and authority, as perfect health and soundness are preferable

are preferable to the best physic and most certain cure.

Another very great and beneficial consequence of this inward rule and government of ourselves, with respect to which it exceeds all outward power and authority; is, that it is this which makes civil power and authority itself beneficial.

Which is worst, tyranny and oppression, or anarchy and confusion, I shall not at present dispute. But this I think is certain, and what all must agree to; that it is much better to be governed by good and wholesome laws, and according to the rules of justice, equity, and mercy, than to be subject to arbitrary will and unreasonable humour, to impetuous lust and passion; against which there is no security, but this government of a man's self and his own passions.

There is nothing more certain than this, that he is not fit to command others, who is not able to govern himself. For the same passions that render men uneasy to themselves, will make them troublesome to others. If pride and passion, anger and revenge, domineer at home in a man's own breast; they will prevail and bear

bear rule in his public management of affairs. Might and power are in themselves indifferent; and the good or bad use of them, lies in the application.

He that by his will is enabled to design good, and by his wisdom to contrive it, and by his actions to effect it, and so become a public benefactor to others, and useful to the world; is also by the same will enabled to design mischief, and by the same wisdom to contrive it, and by the same actions to bring it about, and so become pernicious, and a plague to himself and others. When these powers are directed and employed by reason and conscience, they become beneficial; when they are under the government of blind lust and passion, they are mischievous and destructive. This is the true reason of all those oppressions, which are done under the sun.

Nor does this hold only of those in the highest station, but of all others who have any power or authority. None of these will be able to make a right use of their power, and employ it for the good and benefit of others; unless they be able to rule their own spirits, and have

gained this dominion over themselves. Without this no man can be a good parent or master, a faithful friend or an useful neighbour, or discharge any of those relations which he may stand in to others. Nothing of this kind can be done, where passion has gained the ascendancy over reason, and the man is a slave to his lusts and appetites. We must first lay a restraint upon these, before we can duly exercise any authority over others.

The like is true of those that are to obey, as well as those that are to command. He that has not learn'd to obey the reason of his own mind, will find it difficult to comply with the commands of others.

The consequence therefore of this rule over our own spirits, is great and extensive; and affects all the relative duties of life. Without this, there is nothing incumbent on us, which we can duly discharge: we shall be fit neither to govern, nor obey. The greatest external power, for want of this inward oeconomy and government, will prove either pernicious and destructive, or useless and insignificant. It will either be
executed

executed after a wrong manner, or fall short of due obedience.

But to come nearer to ourselves in our private capacity. Another consequence of this government of ourselves, in which it exceeds all external power; is, that it naturally tends to increase our liberty, and set us free from all those vicious passions, which would enslave and debase us.

The liberty of a rational creature, does not consist in an entire exemption from all laws and rules whatsoever: this is not liberty, but licentiousness. The freedom of a man, is not to be placed in living as he pleases, in being led away by his passions; but it consists in following the dictates of reason, in being free to hearken to wise and sober council; and always to do that, which upon the whole, is best and fittest to be done.

This is true liberty, and perfect freedom; and this is what the greatest external power can neither give us, nor take from us. It can only be had by ruling ourselves, and governing our own passions; and therefore this self government is, in respect of this consequence of it, infinitely preferable to any the greatest

greatest external power and authority. For the consequence of it, is no less than a freedom from the slavery of sin. And how much preferable is this to gaining battles, and taking cities! For may not our Saviour's words here be fitly applied? "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul;" if he shall conquer whole nations and kingdoms, and not subdue his own passions; which amidst all his conquests will sink him into misery and slavery, and change his glory into shame and contempt?

What has been said is I hope sufficient to recommend to you this rule and government of the spirit; which is not only better and more excellent in itself than any external power and authority, but is also attended with greater and more beneficial consequences, both in our public and private capacities, both with respect to this world and another.

What then remains, but that, laying aside all strife and contention with others, every one should earnestly contend and strive for the mastery over himself, and the rule of his own spirit; which is the greatest and truest victory in the world.

Instead

Instead of being overcome of evil, we should overcome evil with good, be slow to anger rather than hasty to revenge; and prefer the conquest of our passions, to the gratification of them.

This is a victory which will not indeed be soon or easily gained, but it will abundantly recompence us for all the time and pains we bestow upon it. And though it may give us some trouble at present, it will grow easier by degrees, and at last yield us the peaceable fruit of righteousness, and procure us everlasting life.

S E R M O N X.

UPRIGHTNESS A MAN'S
GREATEST SECURITY.

PROVERBS x. 9.

He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.

IN all the widely different designs that men are carrying on in the world, and in all the variety of means which they make use of to pursue those different designs; the great care and business of their lives, the subject of all their thoughts
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and consultations is, how to secure that which they esteem their chief interest, and how to pursue it upon the surest grounds. He that can best order his affairs so, that notwithstanding all the hazards he must necessarily run, and all the disappointments he must probably meet withal, yet in the end he succeeds in his main design; is generally reputed a prudent and wise man: and if the ends which he pursues, be indeed as commendable, as the means which he makes use of are proper to those ends; then he really is, what he is reputed to be, truly wise. Now the great and ultimate end which all men in general pursue, and to which all other ends are but subordinate, is happiness: and he that can so direct his life, that whatsoever becomes of all other concerns, yet he may be sure not to fail of this at last; acts the wisest and most prudent part that it is possible for him to act. How to accomplish this therefore, ought to be the great inquiry and study of our lives; the principal subject of our thoughts and meditations. Solomon, to whom God gave a wise and understanding heart, so that before him there was none like him, neither shall any like him arise after him;

him; who had carefully considered and thoroughly examined all things under the sun; and was therefore most likely to give a true judgment of them; gives us his opinion of this whole matter in that affectionate conclusion of his book of Ecclesiastes; "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole; the whole duty, and the whole happiness of man;" this is that alone, which will carry him securely through the world, and lead him without error to his final happiness. Agreeable to which are the words of the text: "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely."

"He that walketh uprightly," is one who in the general course of his life bears a constant regard to God and his commandments; so as not to be prevailed upon by any interest or passion to undertake any thing, but what may conduce to the glory of God and his own future happiness, or at least not be inconsistent with those two great ends. To "walk surely," is to be in a safe condition; to be out of danger of falling into any extreme calamity; and to have our main interest secured, that, notwithstanding whatever
may

may happen for a time, yet our great and chief designs shall certainly succeed happily in the end. The sum therefore of the wise man's assertion, is briefly this; he that in the whole course of his life acts sincerely and justly, with a continual respect to the reason of things, and to the law of God; that carries on all his undertakings by fair and equitable means, avoiding all frauds and deceits, all base and unworthy practices; this man takes the wisest and surest course to succeed in all his designs, respecting either his present or his future happiness. In proof of this doctrine I observe,

First; That the upright man begins to act, or sets out upon the best and surest grounds. To the undertaking and prosecuting any design upon good grounds, it is requisite, that the reasons upon which a man undertakes it, be firm and stable, and such as will not change; that he be well assured that the way he intends to go, will lead him right to that end; and, that he be sure not to mistake that way. Now in all these respects the upright man evidently begins to act, or sets out upon the best and most sure grounds.

The reasons upon which he enters into
such

such a course of life, are firm and stable, and such as will never change. That there is a God, who as he created all things by the word of his power, so he upholds and governs them by his all-wise Providence; that this Supreme Being takes notice of the lives and actions of men; and, according to their different works, will reward or punish them, either in the present or in a future state; that there is a natural and unchangeable difference between good and evil; by chusing of which respectively, we therefore render ourselves acceptable in the sight of God, or necessarily fall under his anger and displeasure; that true peace and content of mind can arise only from sincerity and innocency of life, as horror and anguish will certainly accompany sin and guilt; lastly, that all the real happiness of this world, consists only in that quiet and peace of mind, and the joyful assurance of the favour of God, as all its real misery does in a guilty and troubled conscience, and the fearful expectation of the revelation of the wrath and righteous judgment of God; these are some of the reasons, upon which the upright man chooses his course of life. As impossible therefore as it is for God not
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to be, or not to govern the world; as impossible as it is for that supreme governor of the universe, not to take notice of the lives and actions of men, and according to their different works to reward or punish them for them; as impossible as it is for the difference of good and evil to cease, and for impiety to become acceptable in the sight of God; lastly, as impossible as it is for sincerity and innocence of life, to fail of procuring true peace of mind; or wickedness, of causing horror, anguish, and despair; so impossible is it for the reasons, upon which the upright man chooses his course of life, to cease or alter. Hence his resolutions become firm and invariable in all the vicissitudes of time and fortune; and no storm can make him waver from his main purpose, because his hopes and expectations are founded upon a rock, whose foundations are deeper than those of heaven and earth. He is not liable to those doubts and misgivings, those fears and anxieties, that uncertainty and sollicitude, which is the endless uneasiness of other men's lives; because he is infallibly certain that he acts upon good grounds, and that the reasons he goes upon

upon are permanent and unalterable. The reasons upon which worldly men chuse the crooked paths of deceit and wickedness, are either absolutely false, and such as have no real being at all; or at least such as cease and alter perpetually with the circumstances and casualties of time; leaving them to repent, of having grounded their actions upon a foundation, which they knew not how soon the next storm might wash away. They who go on in a course of sin, upon the hopes of impunity here, and some slight arguments against the certainty of a state of recompence hereafter; do for the most part here, but without fail hereafter, find that the ground they went upon, was absolutely false. They who upon this imagination, that sensual pleasure is their chief good, make that the only object of their hopes and endeavours; do find in age or sickness that they were totally mistaken: and that the remembrance of those pleasures, the enjoyment of which they thought their only happiness, is indeed a more real and lasting misery. They who upon an opinion that riches is their chief happiness, prosecute the design of growing wealthy, by all the indirect

direct means of fraud and deceit, of unrighteousness and over-reaching their neighbours; do very seldom enjoy that satisfaction long, before they become sensible, that they had not sufficient reason, to make shipwreck of a good conscience for its sake. Honour, passion, humour, and the like, are still far weaker and more mutable grounds of action; so that he who is guided by them, must needs be wavering and unstable in all his ways, "like a ship tossed about with every blast of wind." But now he that upon the forementioned grounds walks in the straight paths of uprightness and sincerity, is sure that the reasons he goes upon are true, and that they are eternally and unchangeably so.

And, as the reasons upon which the upright man acts, are firm and stable, and such as will never change; so he is well assured that the way he resolves to walk in, will lead him directly to his intended end. For, both by the natural tendency of things (as I shall presently have occasion more particularly to explain) has he the best probability of success at present; and by the promise of God he is infallibly ascertained, that at least

least finally he shall not fail of being happy hereafter: whereas, on the contrary, in the ways of unrighteousness and iniquity, ambitious and covetous men, who for the obtaining of riches or pleasure make use of sinful and indirect means, do not only find that the reasons upon which they prosecute those designs by such means, are weak and false, but also very often that those means themselves are insufficient to obtain their ends. For besides that they are never sure but God may blast their designs, and in the course of his Providence, frustrate their undertakings; besides this, I say, how often do they fall into dishonour by those very indirect means, by which they were endeavouring to raise themselves to honour; and by a discovery of their fraud and injustice, deprive themselves wholly of that very profit, which they designed to gain more expeditiously, as they imagined, by those shorter methods of unrighteousness! The upright man hath both the promise of God and the natural constitution of things, to secure him from failing in his great designs; than which what greater security can be desired? But of this more fully when I come to show, that

VOL. V. K the

the upright man in the continuance of his course has the greatest probability not to fall into any considerable disappointment, or at least, whatever disappointments he may before meet with, that yet at the final result of things, he shall be sure to be crowned with the most complete success.

Moreover; As the upright man is well assured that the way he intends to walk in, will lead him right to his designed end; so he is very certain that he shall not mistake that way. The paths of virtue and righteousness are plain and straight; so that the blind, that is, persons of the meanest capacity, with an upright intention, shall not err therein. The ways of iniquity and injustice, of fraud and deceit, are infinitely various and uncertain; full of intricate mazes, perplexity, and obscurity: it requires great skill and industry to find out such methods of over-reaching our neighbours, as will have any probability of success; it requires much study and intenseness, to manage the design to the best advantage; and it cannot but cause much solicitude of mind, to be always in fear of being disappointed by a discovery.

ry. How many do we meet with in the world, who, (out of a greedy desire of a little greater gain) endeavouring to overreach and deceive their neighbours, have for want of laying their contrivances cunningly enough, and managing them with secrecy and advantage, fallen short of that gain which they might without farther trouble have gotten in the plain way of honesty and uprightness! Whereas, the path of integrity is a plain and a smooth road; and though perhaps not always the shortest way to riches and honour; yet he that keeps constantly on in this path, is surer not to mistake his way and lose himself, than he that climbs over rocks and precipices in hopes of coming sooner to his journey's end. The upright man lays no projects which it is the interest of his neighbour to hinder from succeeding; and therefore he needs no indirect methods, no fraudulent and deceitful practices, to secure his own interest by undermining his neighbour's: he frames no designs (if he be in a private station) which depend much upon secrecy for success; and therefore he is not in a continual anxiety and solicitude of mind, lest a discovery should make

them prove abortive. In a word, as the ways of iniquity are rough and slippery, dark and crooked, intricate and perplexing; so the paths of uprightness are clear and even, plain and direct, that the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein. "The way of the wicked," saith Solomon, "is as darkness, they know not at what they stumble; But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

I proceed to observe, that in the continuance and whole course of his affairs, he has the greatest probability not to fall into any considerable disappointment or calamity. And that for these two reasons. Because the way of uprightness is in itself most free from danger, and, according to the natural constitution of things, least liable to misfortunes and disappointments; and, because it is moreover guarded and protected, by the favour and providence of God. "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom, I have led thee in right paths: when thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitned; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble." That the way of uprightness

ness is in itself most free from danger, and according to the natural constitution of things, least liable to misfortune and disappointments, must needs be confessed, by every one that considers the nature of things, the general cause of men's miseries and calamities, and the true and natural tendency of uprightness and sincerity. If the constitution of things be evidently such, that the society of mankind and the peace of the world cannot possibly be maintained without some degree of faith and sincerity amongst men; and that the less of this uprightness there be found in the world, so much the nearer things draw to confusion and dissolution: if the general causes of men's misfortunes and disappointments, lie manifestly in their own irregularities and disorders; and the ruin of most men be evidently owing, to their own deceitful and indirect practices; as I think cannot be denied to be the case; then is uprightness undoubtedly the securest and least dangerous course. If the securing our good name and reputation in the world; if the gaining the generality of mankind, the best and wisest of them at least, to be our friends; if

the making our private interest the same with the public, and founding the hopes of our own advantages not on the ruin but prosperity of our neighbours, be the likeliest way to prosper in the world; then has uprightness clearly the advantage. For, what more certain method can a man take, to secure his credit and reputation, than to do nothing, but what the more nicely and exactly it be looked into, the greater approbation it will be sure to receive? And what better and more effectual means can a man make use of, to secure to himself lasting and beneficial friendships, than “to lead an
“ uncorrupt life, and to do the thing
“ which is right, and speak the truth
“ from his heart; to use no deceit in his
“ tongue, nor do evil to his neighbour;
“ but to swear to his neighbour, and dis-
“ appoint him not, though it be to his
“ own hindrance.”

But farther; As uprightness is in itself the safest and least dangerous course; so is it moreover guarded by the favour and providence of God. He that lives uprightly, in a constant and sincere regard to all God's commands, is an immediate servant and imitator of God; a promoter of his glory, and of the establishment

blishment of his kingdom upon earth: and besides that it is the nature of Infinite Goodness to delight in the prosperity of his servants; and to make those partakers of his happiness, who have endeavoured to be like him in holiness and purity; he has moreover obliged himself by innumerable promises in scripture, "that those who trust in him, shall be safe under the shadow of his wings;" that is, under his Almighty protection. "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully; he shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." And the Royal Prophet having given a particular description of a just and upright man, concludes all with these words; "He that doth these things, shall never fall:" or, as it is elsewhere rendered, "shall never be moved." Which words are thus paraphrased by the prophet Isaiah; "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions; that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes; that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high;

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“high; his place of defence shall be the
“munitions of rocks; his bread shall be
“given him, his water shall be sure:”
the meaning is; he that is just and right-
eous in all his dealings, shall by the fa-
vourable protection of Divine Provi-
dence, as by an impregnable fortress, be
defended against all extreme calamities.
Godliness hath the promise of this life as
well as of that which is to come; and
excepting the single case of persecution
for religion, I believe it is certain in
experience, that upright and religious
men do more generally, in the whole
course of their lives, prosper in their
worldly concerns, and meet with fewer
calamities and disappointments, than such
as endeavour to enrich themselves by
sinister and indirect means. Excepting,
I say, the case of persecution for religion;
for in that case indeed, I do not see how
religious men can be said to have the ad-
vantage in this world, when St. Paul him-
self confesses, “that if in this life only they
“had hope, they were of all men the most
“miserable.” Therefore one case it must be
confessed there is, wherein pious and sincere
persons cannot indeed enjoy the benefit of
these promises; and that is, in the case
of

of persecution for religion: but then in that case, their comfort is, that their hope is not only in this life: they have a joyful expectation of a future and better state; and that expectation is many times so glorious and so comfortable, as to make them evidently more happy, even under the severest persecutions, than their persecutors are in their greatest splendor and glory. And this I suppose is that which our Saviour intends, when he promises that there shall be no one "who shall leave father, or mother, or wife, or children, or houses, or lands, for his sake and the gospel's, who shall not in this world receive an hundred fold;" that is, such inward comfort and joy, as infinitely exceeds all worldly enjoyments. Thus the upright man through the whole course of his life, from his first beginning to act, to the time of his departure out of this world, has evidently in all respects the advantage over the wicked. How much more at and after death will he appear to have chosen infinitely the wisest part!

For in the end and last issue of things, the upright man has the utmost security, whatever disappointments he may before meet with, that his designs shall then be

crowned with the most perfect success. It is the event and final issue of things, that determines the wisdom or folly of any action. Many undertakings may seem wise or foolish, to him that looks no farther than the present; which to another, who can foresee the end of things, may have a very different aspect. David, when he considered the present prosperity of the wicked, without looking any further, was very much shaken in mind, and almost tempted to pronounce their condition happy; but when he went into the temple of God, and considered the end of those men, he saw good reason to alter his opinion, and wonder at the short-sightedness of his former judgment. He that renounces his title to a large estate in reversion, for some very small and inconsiderable present advantage, may to heedless persons seem to make a wiser bargain, than he who parts with some present advantages for good security of far greater ones to come. But whoever can look to the end of things, when time shall bring that to be present which is now remote, and shall represent it in its true value; will see that the former makes so much the wiser choice,

as the future advantage is greater than the present. Now this, and generally much more unequal than this, is the case between the righteous man and the wicked. For the righteousness of man secures to himself his eternal interest, and yet at the same time runs no greater hazard of his temporal, than the wicked man does; whereas on the contrary the wicked man, without at all securing his temporal happiness, forfeits for nothing his title to that which is eternal. But more particularly; the upright man will at the end appear to have chosen the wiser course,

Upon account of that peace of conscience which will attend him, at the hour of death. "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." When he looks back upon his past life, and finds that in the general course thereof he has with simplicity and sincerity obeyed the dictates of his own conscience; that his actions have not been biassed by passion or appetite, by any mean, unlawful, or private interest; but that he has done all things in obedience to the law of God; with a sincere design of promoting only the glory

of God, the welfare of his neighbour, and his own true and eternal interest; in a word, that whatever particular infirmities he may have been guilty of, yet the main, the general, the prevailing design of his life, has always been upright and sincere; the result of this, must needs be such a joy and satisfaction of mind, as is infinitely preferable to all other pleasures in the world. He can look upon death, that king of terrors to the wicked, to be to himself only a passage into that state, where he is as sure of being made happy, as he is that true holiness is acceptable to God, and cannot fail of being rewarded by him. This is the state of a truly sincere and righteous man at the hour of death. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

The wisdom of the upright man's choice appears still more compleat, by considering the greatness of that happiness which will attend him after death; a state of joy unspeakable and full of glory; of glories, "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive." All the hope, all the possible ground, that a wicked

wicked man can proceed upon, is that vain and unreasonable surmise, that possibly there may be no such future state, no judgment, no happiness, no misery to come: and were this his vain hope to prove true, it is manifest he could gain nothing by it more than the righteous, in that state where all things would be equally forgotten; whereas if it proves false, he is miserable and undone for ever. On the contrary, the upright man's assurance is, that after this short and transitory life, there will succeed an eternal state of rewards and punishments, wherein God the righteous judge shall render to every man according to what he has done in the flesh, whether it be good or evil; and were this his hope to prove false, it is evident he runs no hazard of being more miserable than the wicked, when both were to be no more. But if these things be true, (as he has all possible evidence that they are) he is unspeakably happy, and that for ever. And is not this undeniably, walking most surely and most wisely? Is not this building upon the strongest foundation? As certainly as vice is odious, and virtue acceptable and well-pleasing in his sight; as certainly as

a just God will reward those who obey his laws, and punish those who affront and despise them; so certain is it, that the upright man shall be justified and fully rewarded, at the final judgment and decision of things; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. "The wicked worketh a deceitful work, but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward." What the upright man has done, shall then be vindicated and approved; and what he has suffered, shall be abundantly made good; every thing shall then be perfectly laid open, and exposed in its true and proper light; plainness and sincerity, shall then appear the most perfect beauty; and the craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive, be stripped of all its colours; all specious pretences, all the methods of deceit, shall then be disclosed before men and angels; and no artifice, no false colours, to conceal the deformity of iniquity, shall there take place. In a word, the ill-designing men of this world shall then with shame be convinced, that upright simplicity, which they despised and derided, is the truest wisdom; and that those dishonest arts,

arts, which they so highly esteemed, were in reality the meereft folly : then shall it appear, “ that the fear of the Lord, “ and that only is wisdom, and to depart “ from evil, that alone is understanding. “ And when they see the exaltation of the “ righteous in that day, they shall be forced to exclaim, We fools accounted “ his life madness, and his end to be without honour ; how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot “ is among the saints !”

SER-

S E R M O N XI.

ON THE TRUE USE OF
RICHES.

MATTHEW vi. 19, 20.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

RICHES and poverty, when considered in themselves, appear amongst the indifferent things of life; the grace and favour of God may accompany either
either

either of them, and virtue and happiness be equally the lot of the poor, as well as of the wealthy man: "For the Almighty
"accepteth not the persons of princes,
"nor regardeth the rich more than the
"poor; they being all the work of his
"hands." Riches are then only blessings, "when their possessors are found without blemish;" when they are attended with charity, and made valuable by good works: whilst poverty, even the lowest degrees of it, supported with contentment, and set off with that best of ornaments, a benevolent mind, is far greater gain than the acquisition of the whole world, with the hazard of the loss of the soul. But if, "when we have
"eaten and are full, and have built
"goodly houses, and dwelt therein, and
"our herds and our flocks multiply, and
"our silver and our gold is multiplied,
"and all that we have is multiplied, our
"hearts be lifted up, and we forget the
"Lord our God, and say within our
"heart, My power, my wisdom, and the
"might of my hand hath gotten me this
"wealth;" if vanity, arrogance, and presumption be suffered to have the sovereign command of our riches; in that
case



case they become a snare, a temptation, and a misfortune to us: as, on the other side, if the poor man be induced by his condition to murmur against the dispensations of Providence, to envy his more wealthy neighbour, "to steal, and to take the name of his God in vain;" under these circumstances indeed his poverty is a real evil to him, his reproach and ruin.

When, therefore, we are commanded by Christ, "not to lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth, but to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven;" this precept is not to be so rigidly interpreted, as if it contained a prohibition against laying up worldly riches; but must be understood only by way of choice or preference: as if our Saviour had said, Rather be solicitous to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, than upon earth; have a greater solicitude about the one than the other. For such propositions by way of opposition to one another, and yet implying only a choice or preference in them, are frequently to be met with in scripture. Thus, for instance, when God says by the mouth of the prophet, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice;" it is not to be
imagined

imagined that sacrifices are here forbidden, but that the Almighty "would rather have mercy than sacrifice;" the one is absolutely necessary to be done, and the other (under the Jewish dispensation) was not to be left undone. So, again, when Agur, in his celebrated prayer, requests of the Lord, "That he would give him "neither poverty nor riches, but feed "him with food convenient for him;" it is not to be conceived, as if he prayed absolutely against riches, or absolutely against poverty; but his petition is a petition of comparison: "Rather than "either poverty or riches, give me that "happy mean which lies between both;" that is, "feed me with food convenient for me."

Riches therefore, even the riches of this world, may safely be pursued, whilst they are pursued with honesty, and enjoyed with innocence; whilst they are looked upon as means only, put into our hands by Providence, to purchase for us a larger portion of that truer treasure, which is prepared for good men, eternal in the heavens; whilst they are made subservient to the honour of God, and the common happiness. But to be so eager
after

after abundance and excess of wealth, as to put no limits to our inordinate desires, to force all other considerations to yield, and give way to the love of money; what is this in reality but to reverse the precept of our Saviour, to act in express contradiction to his command, and to be careful rather “to lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth, than in heaven?” “Easier will it be found for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for such rich men to enter into the kingdom of God.” These are they, who, through occasion of their wealth, “fall into divers temptations and snares, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown them in perdition;” their gain is their loss, and when they fondly imagine their treasures to be the greatest, and their joys at the height, then are they in fact, most poor and wretched.

Am I then, replies with some impatience the man who has great possessions, am I to reject the gifts and blessings of God? am I commanded to renounce the vineyard of my forefathers, and to throw away the fruits of my industry and superior skill? “am I to sell whatsoever I have, and give it away in alms to the
“poor,”

“poor,” to maintain others, by my labours, in ease and idleness? By no means! neither the laws of right reason, nor the precepts of pure christianity demand this of thee: only resolve to make a good use of what thou hast, and thy very treasure shall be sanctified unto thee, and thy reward shall be greater in heaven. For it seems to be little less than a contradiction in terms to suppose, that God should require us “to be perfect as he is perfect,” and at the same time enjoin us, wholly to divest ourselves of the very means by which we continually have it in our power to imitate his most amiable perfection; in contributing both to the present and future happiness of so many of his creatures. The command to the young man in the gospel, “to sell all that he had,” does not affect christians in general, it being relative to that person only to whom it was spoken, and intended by Christ to check his forward presumption, (who had arrogantly boasted, that he had “kept the whole law from his youth upwards”) and to convince him, that his love of eternal life was not quite so ardent and sincere, as he had pretended. Knowing indeed
whose

whose we are, and for what ends we were sent into life, we ought to sit so loose to the world, to all its pleasures, vanities, and acquisitions, that when "the rains descend, the floods come, the winds blow, and persecutions begin to arise," we may be prepared to "forsake all, and follow Christ; to pluck out an eye, or to cut off a right hand," if they are impediments to us in securing our eternal interests. We may still love "our fathers and our mothers, our houses and our lands, and yet continue worthy of him," if our regard to these secular concerns, and relations, be kept in subordination to that superior reverence and obedience, which we owe to the will and commandments of Christ.

Riches, (however we may fondly dote upon their possession, and suffer our childish fancies to be dazzled with their false glare) are certainly of no value or estimation in the sight of God, and should be of none in the sight of men, unless benevolence sets her stamp upon them, and good works give them a currency. The words of the angelic hymn upon the birth of Christ, "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to-
wards

“wards men,” will afford us the best direction for the proper management and distribution of them. For as “the whole
“earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness
“thereof;” as we have nothing but what we first received from him; it is our indispensable duty, in the first place, “to
“honour him with our substance, and
“with the first fruits of all our increase.” This he justly expects and demands, as a tribute at our hands, for the innumerable benefits which he has bestowed upon us. Words are easily spoken, and merely verbal thanksgivings may be offered by the most abandoned of men; but God will not be so satisfied. He hath expressly told us by his Apostles, that “faith without works is dead;” and that the
“end of the commandment is charity.” They are deeds therefore which he exacts of us; a conformity to his will, is the tribute whereby we are to acknowledge him as our master and only sovereign. “Thine, O Lord, is the
“kingdom, and thou art exalted over
“all: both riches and honour come of
“thee, and thou reignest over all, and
“in thine hand is power and might, and
“in thine hand it is to make great and
“to

“to give strength unto all. All things
“come of thee, and of thine own have
“we given thee.”

Nor let the sensual and avaricious, those
gross abusers of the divine favours, sunk
within their own selfishness, think to ex-
cuse themselves with saying, “God is in
heaven, and we upon earth;” how then
shall we pay him this tribute, or “what
“reward can we render unto him for all
“his benefits?” God being perfectly happy
from eternity, and all-sufficient, “with
what shall we come before him;” or how
is it possible for creatures so mean and
inconsiderable as we are, “to honour
him with our substance? Behold his de-
puties to receive this acknowledgment,
this tribute from us; his representatives, if
they may be so termed, in every worthy
object in distress, which presents itself be-
fore us! For God himself hath assured
us in his holy scriptures, that he will ac-
cept every instance of love which we show
unto our brother, as the most acceptable
proof we can give of our love to him: and
that whatsoever acts of piety, kindness,
and compassion, “we shall do unto one
“of the least of these our fellow-crea-
VOL. V. L tures,

“tures, he will receive as done unto
“himself.”

Here then is the proper sphere for riches to move in. The surest and most effectual means of securing our own happiness, and at the same time of testifying our love, our thanks and gratitude, “to the
“Father of mercies, and giver of all
“good gifts,” is to cloathe the naked, to feed the hungry, to be kind to strangers, to relieve the sick, and to “break the
“chains of the oppressed; to be eyes to
“the blind, and feet the lame; to deliver the poor that cry, the fatherless, and
“him that hath none to help him.”

Charge them therefore, “who are rich in this world,” that they be rich likewise and abounding in all good works; that “they be willing to communicate;” that their ears be ever open to the cries of the poor and destitute, and their hands ready to distribute to the relief of the necessities of the fatherless, and of him that is ready to perish. For this is, indeed, to use the good things of this life, so as not to abuse them; “it is to lay up for ourselves a treasure in the heavens, which faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither
“moth corrupteth:” it is to imitate the
perfection

perfection of our universal Father; it is to look upon ourselves as parts only of that great whole, whose happiness we are obliged to promote, as much as lies in our power; it is to regard ourselves merely as "stewards of the manifold gifts and graces of God;" as entrusted with a number of talents, of the good or bad management of which we must be always ready to give an account, whenever our supreme Lord shall please to call for it.

On the other hand, the sons of avarice and voluptuousness, the men who are rich unto themselves only, and whose whole treasure is upon earth, (if they ever give themselves leisure to reflect, and lay down any settled principles of action) must respect themselves as a sort of independent beings, either born at all adventure, or purposely sent into being for their own sakes merely, and without any other relation to the rest of the world, than as it may be made subservient to (what they are pleased to term) their happiness.

They place themselves, as it were, in the centre of the universe, and all things are made to tend towards them. If it rains, it is for their benefit; for their pleasure and advantage the sun rises,

“and the vallies are covered over with corn.” “Our life,” say they, “is short and tedious, and in the death of a man there is no remedy; come on, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures like as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wines and ointments; and let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rose-buds before they be withered. Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness: let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place: for this is our portion, and our lot is this. Let us oppress the poor righteous man, let us not spare the widow, nor reverence the antient grey hairs of the aged. Let our strength be the law of justice, for that which is feeble is found to be nothing worth.”

But can we be so absurd, so very weak as to imagine, that such is really the case, and that we were created only to gratify our intemperate passions, and to indulge our extravagant appetites? Could our riches be given us for so mean and despicable a purpose, as that we should respect ourselves only in the use of them; that

that we should make our own empty and extravagant pleasures the only rule in the acquisition, preservation and distribution of them? Was our wealth bestowed upon us, to fill our hearts with insolence and pride, to give us a licence “to grind the face of the poor and destitute,” to oppress and to defraud with impunity? None, but such as have “said in their hearts there is no God,” can either have so high an opinion of their own significancy and importance, or so low an idea of our common Father and Benefactor, as to suffer themselves to be deluded with such arrogant conceits.

If the Author of our being be all-wise and all-perfect, and that he is all-wise and all-perfect the voice of nature every where proclaims, he could not possibly make such glorious creatures, as men are or might be, for so low and despicable a purpose, as merely to eat, to drink, to sleep, and to be merry; he must have intended something farther in their creation. Would he have give them reason, only that they might act irrationally? Would he have taught and implanted in them a principle of benevolence, that

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they

they should be indifferent to all the world except themselves? Had his meaning been, that we should have acted like the brute beasts which every where surround us, he would have originally fashioned us like them. Would we but in this manner study earnestly the knowledge of ourselves, of our own powers and perfections, we should soon learn from them, (for they would teach us) that we could not possibly be created for our own sakes only, but that our whole species, in some measure, claim a share in us. Let the very pains, which we so often feel and lament, convince us, that we are neither independent nor self-sufficient: let them admonish us, as Providence designed they should, that there is still another state of things behind the scene, and that we are every day approaching nearer and nearer to the view of it! Behold the very riches wherein we so much trust, and from whose lustre we borrow all our splendid importance, to how many thousand changes and chances are they perpetually obnoxious! "The fire of God may fall from heaven, and burn up our sheep and our servants, and consume all that we have;" or, "thieves may break through and steal

steal our choicest treasures;" or, our own follies and vices, "worse than either "moth or rust, may corrupt and devour "them;" or, "our souls may be required of us this night;" and then, what is become of all our boasting and our confidence! "what hath our pride profited us," or "what good have riches, with "our vaunting, brought upon us? all "those things are passed away like a "shadow, and as a post that hasteth by!" the "reed whereon we leaned is broken, our hand is pierced through," and we are fallen never more to rise, unless it be to give an account of the time and talents which we have so grossly mispent and abused.

It must, however, be granted, that as the harmony and good order of the world is at present established, and the preservation and government of societies founded in the different ranks and classes of its members (the high and low, the rich and poor) a competent share of the good things of this earth, such a proportion of them as is suitable to each man's state and condition in it, is extremely needful to make him pass through life agreeably to himself, and serviceably to others.

For that wealth which would denominate a private person rich, a nobleman may have, and more abundantly, and yet be poor. Nor would I be thought to have insinuated any thing against that decent care, which every christian, according to his daily prayer, is indispensibly obliged to take in providing his daily bread, and in laying up in store for those of his own household. Only let us not be over-anxious in these pursuits; let us not look upon riches as "the one thing necessary," which must be obtained and kept at all hazards; let us not respect them as the end of our being, but as means only to exercise our humanity, to make trial of our virtue, and thereby, at length, to render us more worthy of the supreme happiness for which our great Creator originally designed us. Rather let us be solicitous "to lay up treasures in heaven, than upon earth;" because it is a most undoubted truth, that "where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also."

Here then begins our error, and this is the deep and wide foundation of the many capital mistakes, which we are so apt to make in this great and leading point.

point. We first look upon riches as our sovereign good; we admire them as all-sufficient, and then fall down and worship the golden image, which our deluded fancies have erected in our hearts. Every thing is sacrificed to almighty Mammon; whilst piety, justice, and temperance, the duties which we owe our God, our neighbour and ourselves, are all made to submit, and give way to the insatiable cravings of this creature of our imagination; and though we may sometimes be made sensible of our egregious folly, or idolatry rather, (as the scripture terms it) yet it is not without great resolution and much difficulty, if ever, that we are able to extricate ourselves from this bondage of wealth.

We must learn, therefore, in the first place, to correct the depravity of our hearts, before we can hope to order our actions aright. For whilst the fountain is suffered to continue impure, it is in vain to expect that the streams, which issue from it, should be sweet and salutary. For this purpose, we cannot too often exercise ourselves in meditating upon the unprofitableness of worldly riches, the uncertainty of their continuance with us,
or

or of our stay with them ; and the little real service they can be of to us in the times of our greatest danger and distress, when racked with bodily pain, when labouring under the anxieties of a disturbed conscience, or when the hour of death approacheth. Above all things, we must encourage, and indulge the natural propensity, which we feel within ourselves towards acts of kindness and compassion to our fellow-creatures ; and never forget to compare the calm, serene, and everlasting pleasures of a well-conducted and religious benevolence, with the fleeting, momentary and tumultuous joys “ of sin .”

If “ our grounds bring forth plentifully, and our garners are full of all manner of stores,” let us not take occasion, from this profusion of God’s blessings, to indulge our wanton and licentious appetites ; and, like the rich man in the gospel, to say to our soul, “ Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry : ” let us not “ set our affections on our goods,” and love them, as we ought to do our Creator, “ with all our hearts, with all our minds, and with all our strength ;” but rather let us be afraid of the increasing temptations,
which

which on every side beset us; let us be more constant and more extensive in our works of charity; and ever ready to testify our affectionate gratitude to the Giver, by the generous and beneficent use we make of his gifts. Let us not be afraid, lest we, or our posterity, may hereafter want, what we so compassionately contribute to the relief of our distressed brethren. For “a father of the fatherless is God himself in his holy habitation;” nor can we do better than imitate his all-perfect example; who, for our greater comfort and encouragement “in going about doing good,” has vouchsafed to promise (and shall he not perform?) that he will place to his own account, and take upon himself the repayment of what shall be laid out “in pity upon the poor.”

Say not then, “where are our alms and righteous deeds?” but let us ask rather what is become of all our voluptuousness? and what lasting advantages have riches without charity bestowed upon us? When the profusion of our luxury, or our vanity, shall rise up in reproach against us; then will the little, which we have given away in charity, be found an in-

“estimable treasure, a sure refuge and
“consolation, laid up against the day of
“distress. Blessed, in that day, shall be
“the merciful, for they shall obtain mer-
“cy. Blessed, for ever blessed, shall
“those faithful stewards of Providence
“be, to whom the judge of the world
“shall say, Well done, good and faith-
“ful servants, you have been faithful
“over a few things, I will make you
“ruler over many things: enter ye into
“the joy of your Lord!”

SER-

S E R M O N XII.

ON OUR SAVIOUR'S SUFFERINGS
AND DEATH.

HEBREWS xii. 2.

*Who, for the joy that was set before him,
endured the cross, despising the shame.*

IN order to apprehend rightly the meaning of these words, it will be requisite to enquire and consider what we are to understand by the joy here spoken of; what the powerful motive was, which prompted our Lord to undertake the arduous

duous work of our redemption, and which supported and animated him in the accomplishment of it. Whatever it was, doubtless it must have been a motive of great importance, which could lead him through a course of such dreadful sufferings, and make him "endure the cross, despising the shame." And to this most painful and ignominious death, we may add the various hardships and distresses of his life; the humble condition he chose, the mortifications he submitted to, and all the insults and indignities he bore, patiently and chearfully, during his whole ministry. Led, I suppose, partly by the context, and partly by some other passages in the New Testament, the generality of interpreters have taken it for granted, that the motive mentioned in my text, was our Saviour's personal advancement, even the subsequent honours and powers conferred on him, and his exaltation at the right hand of God. Nevertheless, if we carefully attend to the great end of our redemption, and to the divine character of our redeemer, we shall find considerable objections to this interpretation. We know assuredly, that Christ came into the world, not for his
own

own sake, but for ours; not with a view to his own advancement, but to promote God's glory, and the salvation of mankind. And though, in consequence of his high merit and dignity, he was actually raised to the forementioned honours; yet it does by no means follow, that he was thereby principally influenced and excited to do and suffer what he did. And indeed such a conclusion is very unsuitable to the sublime character of our redeemer; the purity and perfection of which will not suffer us to entertain any doubt of his acting from the noblest motives, and on the most generous and disinterested principle, as will further be shewn afterwards. Rejecting therefore this construction, as less consistent with his honour, and the perfection of his character, let us proceed to inquire what that joy probably was which my text speaks of; and which is there represented as our Saviour's grand motive, and indeed his principal support and consolation; which lightened the burden of his sufferings, and enabled him to undergo them with greater alacrity.

Now it may, I think, be fairly concluded, that when the joy here spoken
of

of arose, not from a private, but a public cause; even from a prospect of that mighty good which our Saviour was procuring for a whole race of rational creatures; of that inestimable benefit which was to redound to all mankind: that is, to all workers of righteousness, and all true and sincere penitents, over the face of the whole earth. The benefits of Christ's death being universal, it is not to be doubted, but the view of so great and extensive a good must affect him in an extraordinary manner, and produce in such a mind as his the highest satisfaction and complacency. How divine a pleasure must it give him to obtain impunity, and peace, and pardon, for all penitent sinners! To save a sinking world, to recover a lost race, to relieve a perishing species; to rescue them from the doom of death and destruction, bring them back into the way of truth and life, and even purchase for them an everlasting inheritance! Such were the great and godlike ends which he proposed to effect, and which he pursued from first to last by the fittest and most efficacious means; by his heavenly doctrines, and most pure precepts, by his perfect example,

ple, and his transcendent merits. Of this blessed work he knew and foresaw the speedy accomplishment; and the prospect thereof could not fail to afford him, not only the truest comfort, but the most inconceivable delight.

To support and strengthen the foregoing explication, let us consider somewhat further, and more distinctly, how eminently and peculiarly suitable such a motive was to the state and character, and the divine disposition of our Redeemer. Whatever external glories were deserved by him, and accordingly conferred on him, good reason we have to suppose, and be assured, that he had far nobler aims, and more generous views, than his own personal grandeur and exaltation, as was before observed. Private views and interested motives may be, and are, on several accounts, very requisite, and very proper for frail and degenerate men. And more especially so under severe trials and temptations. Nor is the merit and virtue of their good actions lost, nor indeed lessened by aiming at their own future advantage and felicity. This is evident from fact, and the whole tenor of the gospel-dispensation;

sation; which sets before us this motive in the strongest light, and demands our continual attention to it. We find it every where applying to our hopes and fears; inviting and encouraging us to virtue and obedience by the promise of a glorious reward, and deterring us from sin and wickedness by severe and solemn threats, and all the terrors of divine vengeance. And this was highly requisite, or rather absolutely necessary. It appeared too evidently from sad experience, that other motives were generally ineffectual, and for the most part indeed quite overlooked. The bulk of mankind were not to be moved, not to be touched by the reasonableness of doing their duty; by the beauty of virtue, and the amiable nature of worthy actions. But they might, and many of them would, be excited by considerations of interest, by the springs of hope and fear, and the powerful principles of happiness and misery. And even on these principles to become obedient, and embrace their duty, is truly laudable and virtuous. To resist the folli-

solicitations of sin and sense, to restrain impetuous appetites, and mortify corrupt affections, from a regard to future safety and welfare, to distant enjoyments, and invisible advantages, and those of a pure and more spiritual nature, is a conduct highly commendable. This is evident in-itself, and still more so on the foregoing account: for certainly the divine dispensation of the gospel could never contain, never offer to mankind, such motives as would undermine virtue, and destroy the worth of moral actions, and religious duties. It is not therefore to be doubted but christian obedience may be, and indeed ought to be, a beneficial, as well as a reasonable service; and the discharge of our duty will be acceptable to God, though we do it on the principle of self-security, and natural good. But though such a conduct be allowed, either truly moral, or truly religious; yet it is neither the one, nor the other, in perfection. Disinterested benevolence is the highest attainment in virtue, and the most excellent quality in the most perfect minds. And as this is the noblest and purest motive in the world,

world, so it is most Divine. For God himself is influenced entirely by it in all his actions. This we conclude with greater assurance, because he is utterly incapable of receiving, and therefore of proposing, any advantage to himself. For what interest, what benefit, what addition of good, can possibly accrue to him, whose felicity is absolutely perfect, and from whom all happiness proceeds? Certain therefore it is, that he is, and must needs be, wholly disinterested in all his good and gracious dispensations to his creatures. On them he is pouring benefits continually, and immensely, without any prospect of return, or any possibility of advantage to himself.

This then is goodness divine, and in its greatest and highest perfection; and thus pure it perpetually flows from Him, who is the great source and fountain of both. Since therefore such is the nature of God's goodness, can we doubt of its being imitated and copied out by the Son of God, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person?" Would not he be willing and desirous, in conformity to his Father's example, to do good for goodness sake?

fake? And must not this pure and sublime motive have influenced him more than any private prospects, or personal considerations? He requires even his frail disciples to "be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect:" that is, for it can be nothing more, to imitate and resemble him to the utmost of their power. And most sure we are, he would never give them a precept not fully observed, and perfectly practised by himself. For in every instance he acted as he taught, and exemplified his own rules. His goodness therefore to mankind, and all the inestimable services which he did them, must, without question, have been unmercenary and disinterested: nor can we suppose otherwise without depreciating his mercies, diminishing the perfection of his character, and derogating from the glory of his conduct.

Let it be further considered and inquired, whether such a motive was not peculiarly agreeable to that generous zeal, that boundless benevolence which appeared in all our Saviour's actions and proceedings. How active, how extensive, how unwearied, were his endeavours for the service and salvation of mankind! "Glo-
ry

ry to God," and "good-will towards men," were his darling principles, which possessed his heart, and engrossed his affections: on which all his thoughts were fixed, and all his cares centered. The pursuit of them was not only his joy and pleasure, but his very support and sustenance. How indefatigably did he seek and search for all opportunities of doing good! converting the most ordinary incidents and occurrences of life into occasions of bounty and benefaction. The numberless miracles which he wrought, though primarily intended as proofs of his mission, were, at the sametime, pledges of his good-will, and demonstrations of his love. His ardent zeal for the salvation of men's souls was accompanied with a kind care, and a tender concern for the safety and welfare of their bodies. He gave ears to the deaf, eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the sick, and even life to the dead. His favours and blessings descended promiscuously, like rain from heaven, "on the just and on the unjust," on the grateful and the ungrateful. The contradiction of sinners, and the clamours and calumnies of malicious men, produced

duced no other sentiments in him, than those of grief and pity. Base and impious as they were, they could never be more ready to do evil, than he always was to do good; and their greatest injuries and indignities met with no other return than his prayers and benedictions. The worst treatment they could give him was never capable of alienating his affection, or obstructing his kindness; and his greatest grief was, that he could not thereby melt them into repentance; but alas! instead of being mollified by such invincible goodness, they became the more exasperated; and the more he strove to soften their hearts, the harder they became. The result of which was, that, in spite of all his good offices, and miraculous services, they persecuted him even unto death: a death preceded and attended by every possible circumstance of shame and grief. That Heavenly Benefactor, who came into the world on purpose to redeem and rescue it from ruin, must die, it seems, to accomplish it: must die too a most painful and ignominious death, and by their hands, whom he came to save! For that life and liberty, that pardon and peace, which he
came

came to procure them, behold, he receives in return bonds, buffetings, and stripes, the sentence of a malefactor, and the sufferings and death of a slave ! All this, and more than has been, or can be said, our Saviour endured, and even despised, for our sakes. And the principle on which he acted was pure pity, free benevolence, and disinterested goodness. This, if I mistake not, is the doctrine of the text, as I have been endeavouring to shew. The proper uses to be made of this doctrine, though plain and obvious, are too important to be quite omitted.

First then, Since the deliverance and salvation of mankind was the great end proposed by our Saviour, and the joy thence arising, his chief motive for the accomplishment of it ; since, he was so firmly attached to our interest, and so intensely zealous for our welfare, that no difficulties or dangers could deter him from the pursuit of it ; since, moreover, the foresight of our happiness was so pleasing to him, as to lighten his heavy burden, and make him chearfully endure the bitterest indignities, and sharpest sorrows ; what obligations do we lie under for such
amazing

amazing goodness; and with what sentiments of gratitude ought our hearts to be filled! Is it not manifest, that he made our advantage his own, and sacrificed himself to set us free? Was not his whole life a scene of adversity and suffering, and his death terrible beyond conception? Under these pressures his comfort, his joy was, that he was going to redeem a lost world; to exalt a race of wretched creatures, slaves to sin and corruption, "to the glorious liberty of sons of God." In the midst of grief and anguish, when he was exceedingly sorrowful, and sick unto death, this was his cordial. How shall we ever think or speak with due praise, or sufficient thankfulness, of such a Benefactor! Most certain it is, that we ought to do both, much and often, and with all our might. Less than this will be great injustice, and grievous ingratitude. Such unspeakable grace and goodness, so ill deserved, and so impossible to be requited, ought to affect us in a peculiar manner, and make deep and durable impressions on our hearts. We are bound to commemorate such a friend, to celebrate such friendship, to acknowledge such mercies and favours,

in all the proper ways we can think of; and more especially in that way which was appointed by himself: appointed to prevent our minds from sliding into insensibility and forgetfulness; to keep alive and cultivate our gratitude to our Redeemer, and our benevolence and charity to our fellow-creatures. Such an ordinance may be abused (and what is it that men do not abuse?) by irreverence on one hand, and superstition, on the other; but in itself it stands clear of all just exception; is perfectly rational, and peculiarly useful, in promoting the ends above-mentioned. But,

Secondly; Since our safety and felicity were so dear in the sight of our Redeemer, that he was willing to purchase them at any rate, and submitted to all sorts of hardships and distresses on that very account; surely it behoves us to take special heed, that we do not, as far as in us lies, frustrate his kindness, and disappoint his love. He came not into the world to redeem obstinate and impenitent sinners; that was impossible, whatever he had done, or whatever he had suffered. To persist therefore in sinful courses, and wicked habits, is not only treachery

treachery against ourselves, and our own interest; but it is perfidiousness and ingratitude towards our Deliverer. By continuing in this wretched course, and repeating our sins and transgressions, we "crucify the Son of God afresh," as the Apostle expresses it, "and put him to open shame." We not only lessen his triumphs, and diminish his joy, but turn it into grief. Whatever he has done, and whatever he has endured, is all lost on hardened sinners; in respect of whom he both lived and died in vain. On the other hand, the conversion and reformation of every sinner extends our Redeemer's conquest, and is a real addition to his joy. By how much the number of penitent converts is increased, to so much better and nobler purpose did he suffer; and in the same proportion must his satisfaction be augmented. On these accounts, besides the extreme folly and impiety of an impenitent course, there is, we see, a peculiar baseness and malignity therein, which greatly aggravates the guilt of incorrigible sinners, and must proportionably increase their condemnation.

M 2

Thirdly,

Thirdly, and lastly; Since our blessed Saviour lived and died in our behalf, and accomplished our redemption in so free and disinterested a manner; since, moreover, he is our great pattern, and “left us an example, that we should follow his steps;” it is certainly incumbent on us to imitate him, even in this respect, as far as we are able. We cannot indeed pretend to be wholly governed by his divine motive, his generous principle; but ordinarily it must operate in some measure, and produce a good effect on our minds, if we will give it leave: for good and virtuous actions are amiable in their own nature, and as such cannot fail to recommend themselves, and, it is to be hoped, often do so, where no considerable temptation draws against them. Where duty alone cannot prevail, by all means let us hearken to interest; and well it is for us, that the cause of virtue is seconded and supported by so powerful an advocate. But yet it may deserve to be considered, whether over-looking our interest be not sometimes the most effectual way to promote it. All our hopes depend on God’s favour and approbation; and the more we strive to imitate him,
doubtless

doubtless the fairer is our prospect. As then nothing is more opposite to his nature, nothing more odious in his sight, than a selfish and sordid disposition; so nothing is, or can be, more acceptable to him, than an open heart, a public spirit, and a beneficent conduct. And, moreover, it brings a peculiar reward along with it, and yields the purest and noblest enjoyments. In short, true benevolence and charity is happiness in hand, and heaven in reversion. And the more disinterested it is, the greater favour and bliss it procures; improving, advancing, and perfecting men's minds here, and entitling them more abundantly to a blessed and glorious inheritance hereafter.

S E R M O N XIII.

ON RASH JUDGMENT AND CENSURE.

ACTS xxviii. 5, 6.

He shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit, they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly; but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said, that he was a God.

ST. Paul being cast upon the island of Melita, was received by the inhabitants, with the rest of the ship's company, "with no little kindness."

M 4

But

But the Apostle being undistinguished in the crowd, and shifting for himself in the common calamity, gathers some sticks, and stooping down to lay them on the fire, a viper, that had taken shelter against the cold, among those that had been laid on before, either refreshed by the gentle heat, or enraged by the violence of it, "came out of it, and fasted on his hand."

When the Barbarians saw this, their charity was quickly lost in their censoriousness, and "they say amongst themselves, no doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live." But he, supported by faith and a good conscience, without being surprised at the sudden danger, or concerned at their sudden alteration, "shakes off the beast calmly into the fire," and shews, by his composure that "he felt no harm." "Howbeit" (so loth were they to part with their scandal) "they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him;" then these ignorant creatures, as heavy bodies, which are at first hard
to

to be moved, but harder to be stopt afterwards, ran into extremes; from censure to admiration, from detraction to flattery, from slander to absurd applause; "they changed their minds, and said, that he was a God."

Who is there that considers attentively the proceeding of these people, the injustice of their censure, and the folly of their applause, but would immediately resolve to avoid judging others: such especially as are not at all or very little known to him; and that too, upon account of any misfortune that shall befall them?

Who is there that considers also the other part of this passage, "the behaviour of the Apostle," but would resolve, after his great example, to put his trust in God alone, in all events; to despise equally the censure and applause of the inconstant world, and, in the security and tranquillity of a good conscience, proceed on steadily and faithfully in his duty.

There is no doubt but, where the crime is notorious, God sometimes orders the punishment to be such, that he may make bad men examples to the world: and in such cases it is not only lawful but neces-

fary to judge, that we may know how to beware. But then this is to be done when the crime is plain to the whole world, not when it is uncertain whether there be any crime at all; as in the case with Paul, who was a perfect stranger to these people.

For supposing that a private man had authority to judge another; how should this judgment be right, if the person be unknown to him? All he has to be guided by are appearances only. But our blessed Lord commands us "not to judge by appearances, but to judge righteous judgment." As if it were impossible to judge righteous judgment, if we judge by appearance alone. Of all sorts of appearances, none are more uncertain than those which rise from calamities and misfortunes; and therefore it is most unreasonable to judge ill of others, by the afflictions to which they are exposed.

This even the most censorious would be ready to acknowledge, if we should pretend to judge well of others, by their success or prosperity. For example, suppose any one should argue thus: this man is grown rich on a sudden, therefore he must be very honest: such a one is
risen

risen greatly in the world, therefore it is certain he deserves it: another has escaped strangely in imminent danger, therefore he undoubtedly fears God. There are few, I believe, that would allow these conclusions to be just; and yet those are full as unjust, which are drawn against people upon account of any calamity: when, upon their falling into poverty, sickness, or other misfortunes, unhappy men shall be condemned as guilty of some horrid crime, and suffering for it, though at that very moment they shall be, as the Apostle was, faithfully discharging the duty of a good christian, and highly acceptable unto God.

But the unreasonableness of judging of men by their calamities will appear, if we consider that these befall the good, as well as the wicked: and that to good men they are intended as a mercy, and not a punishment: a mercy to themselves, as being a means of their improving in virtue, and of the increase of their reward; and a mercy to others, in both respects, by their great examples.

Besides, this way of judging implies a necessity of bad men's suffering in this life, which is most unreasonable to be

supposed by those who believe a judgment to come. The people in the text knew little of this, and therefore were not so much to be blamed, if they thought immediate punishment attended extraordinary crimes; but this need not be expected by a christian: he should not be surprised to see the murderer escape shipwreck, the adulterer flourish, the busy flatterer thrive, or the bitter detractor encouraged and caressed; because he knows that all these shall receive their recompence hereafter, when the whole world shall appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Add to this, that it is impossible the bad alone should suffer in this life, because they are so mingled with the good that they must suffer often in the same manner: and consequently, that it can never be reasonable to conclude, that all those are bad, and those only, that suffer evil.

Moreover; God has sometimes particular ends and designs in the suffering of good men, and recommends them to the world, by the manner of his protecting them, or by some sudden and unexpected turn of prosperity, in a more remarkable manner,

manner, than if they had never been made subject to any calamity at all. Thus the tempest, which is related at large in the last chapter, was the occasion of the Apostle's shewing his great wisdom, piety and faith, and other virtues, which softened the hearts of the soldiers and seamen, towards him and disposed them, without doubt, to receive the knowledge of the true God: and for the same end was it, that the viper was suffered to wrap itself about his hand, and that he was delivered so miraculously from it. What might I say of upright Job, of the patriarch Joseph, of Daniel, and other prophets? What might I say of the beloved Son of God himself? Though his miserable life and bitter death, made the gospel "a stumbling block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness;" yet to wise and good men, to such "as were called, both Jews and Greeks," it appeared to be upon these very accounts, "the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

The unreasonableness of judging by appearances, not only as to calamities, but as to any external circumstances whatsoever, may be

be seen by the rashness of censoriousness, which will not suffer men to examine present circumstances, or to wait for what may follow. As Providence works by second causes, there must often be a long train of events, before that which is decreed is brought to pass.

So is it in the designs of wise and good men, these may require some time, and depend upon a long course of action, before they are accomplished. But would it be reasonable in these cases to lay hold of any single event, any one particular action: and because it may seem at first to be strange or irregular, censure God and man immediately.

If a man should take up any part of a machine, which he had never seen or heard of before, and that part too unfinished; and, without further enquiry, condemn and despise the whole design, what would he be thought of? how much worse is it to proceed so rashly in what concerns a man's reputation; nay, in what may happen to concern his life itself!

There cannot certainly be a more reasonable part of justice and modesty, than for people to suspect their malice, when
they

they speak of an enemy; or their judgment, when they censure what they do not understand: because, among other considerations, this might save them the blush of changing their opinion, or the confidence of persisting in it.

But so eager is envy, and so swift is malice, that it seizes immediately upon the least appearance; as if men were afraid of losing the opportunity of distraction.

Some good men, to express their satisfaction and pleasure in obedience, have said it was their "meat and drink to do the will of God." It is to be feared, that there are many who indulge their malignant passions with as keen an appetite, who watch men's actions as hungry beasts do their prey, and while railing is their constant diet, live upon corruption; and what is worst of all, after the fullest entertainment are sure to rise with a new appetite.

Where there is this eagerness, this gladness, this impatience to condemn; it must certainly be impossible for men to judge righteously, and consequently, unreasonable for them to judge at all.

Another argument to prove the unreasonable,

reasonableness of judgment is, that censorious people are the most backward in the world, to find and acknowledge themselves to be in the wrong. It was not till "after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to the Apostle," that these slanderers in the text "changed their minds."

I confess indeed, it is hard for those that are guilty of any vice, to condemn themselves. The glutton and the drunkard, the passionate and revengeful, are as slow to own themselves in the wrong, as the covetous or ambitious: but the censorious are beyond all these; and the greater the imposition, still (as it is in matters of religion itself) the bolder the pretences to infallibility. While falsehood and defamation harden by degrees into stubborn pride; and then they who have dealt so freely with other men's honour, shall become of a sudden strangely nice of their own. They know they have been base and malicious, they know that what they have said was false and unjust; but who shall dare to tell them so? For, how often has blood and murder followed? How often have whole families, nay, whole nations been engaged by degrees,

grees, while some have been imposed upon by fresh supplies of scandal, and others impatient to revenge it. So easily kindled, and yet so unquenchable is detraction, according to that of St. James; "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth; the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity, sets on fire the course of nature," entails quarrels from generation to generation, "and is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed and hath been tamed of mankind. But the tongue can no man tame, it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison: therewith bless we God even the Father," the common Father of us all; "and therewith curse we men which are made after the similitude of God." Alas! this last consideration which the Apostle urges so pathetically, is so far from deterring men from this vice, that it seems rather to be a motive to it. For the more true worth and value, the more wisdom and integrity, the more a man has of "the similitude of God," the more likely is he to be defamed; and that too, in the name of God himself.

For

Of all sorts of detractors, none fasten deeper than the religious backbiter, the formal hypocrite, who while he is praising God and himself, condemns all the world beside. When slander is attended with sighs and groans, with eyes and hands that are lifted up, let the clearest innocence, the most unspotted virtue look to itself. For if religion is made the vehicle of the poison, it is conveyed so subtly, so unexpectedly; that it deforms, if not destroys the fairest reputation.

The unreasonableness of this vice will appear yet further, if we consider in the next place; that although a man should be willing, yet it is one of the most difficult things in the world, and next to impossible, to make restitution of a good name, when he has once robbed his neighbour of it.

“A good name is like precious ointment,” in this respect, as well as others; that when once thrown down, it can scarce ever be gathered up again, but never in its purity. Because, supposing any one should be struck with shame and remorse, for having wronged an innocent person; yet, how can he ever make him amends? His submission and recantation will never reach

reach half so far as his defaming did: for nothing is so swiftly, so suddenly diffused as defamation; it flies and blasts like lightning; does more mischief, reaches more persons, than he that began it can ever know, or ever acquaint with his repentance, though he heartily desires it.

Besides, the receivers of scandal are as loth to give it up, as they who first spread it, are to give satisfaction: for there is such a pleasure to some people in believing ill of others, that to be set right again is a perfect disappointment. What must it be then, to own that they are so? yet this is not all neither; they are not only obliged to clear the injured party in these cases; but to accuse themselves; to accuse themselves of credulity, ill nature, want of charity, judgment, or the like; and how few, how very few, will part with scandal upon such terms as these are!

But of all the ways by which men endeavour to make amends in this case, the running into extremes through ignorance or flattery, is certainly the very worst: as when the same men spoken of in the text, who had passed sentence upon Paul as a murderer, “changed their minds, and said, that he was a god.”

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The best thing that can be supposed in this case is, that they would willingly make amends for what they have formerly done or said: but this is impossible, because the same envy and self-love, which dispose men to listen to detraction, will dispose them to shut their ears immediately against extravagant commendations.

Besides, this is not doing any one justice, as is usually pretended; because, if detraction takes from him, flattery adds to him more than he deserves, and by so doing, causes the whole to be called in question; and therefore exposes him to contempt, only in a different way.

If we consider flattery, as to him to whom it is offered; if he allows of it and accepts it, it is the destroying of his understanding, instead of his reputation; it is like poisoning by perfumes, making a man pleased with his ruin, and beholden to you for his destruction.

Add to this, that there are many which observe where flatterers make their court, where they are entertained, encouraged, and caressed, and must despise the person that is imposed upon by them. For to believe flattery, is to make good the worst that detraction can say; it
proves

proves a man to be destitute of good sense and wisdom, and therefore this cannot be a proper way to make restitution of a good name. Flattery is so far from healing the wounds which scandal has made, that it makes them more visible and dangerous.

Lastly; It is both unreasonable and dangerous to censure those that are unknown to us, upon any calamity, or any other external appearance whatsoever; because this is boldly usurping the prerogative of the Almighty. "There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy;" who has a right, as well as power, to enquire into the breach of his own laws, and to reward or punish those that observe or neglect them. "Who art thou that judgest another?" Thou that art subject to error and infirmity thyself, and yet takest upon thee that authority over thy fellow-servant, which belongs to God alone. This conduct is likewise directly contrary to the dictates of our holy religion; to that charity and love which the gospel of peace breathes through every part of it; to that holy example of truth, justice, mercy, and every kind of benevolence, which our blessed Lord hath set before

us, "who did no sin, neither was any guile," any falshood or deceit "found in his mouth." Remember the words of our Saviour, "Judge not, lest ye be judged: for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you again."

If it be so unreasonable and culpable to judge or censure others on account of their sufferings or other external appearances, how much more must it be to detract from those who have no such appearances, but who are known to their very detractors to be men of great virtue, piety, and integrity.

Backbiting and slander are the common effects of all the vices that we are guilty of towards our neighbour: the covetous rail at those they ought to relieve; the cowardly to disguise their fears, and promote their revenge; the ambitious to make way for their advancement; and the vain-glorious to recommend themselves.

The story we are considering may furnish us with some instruction concerning the manner in which a wise and good man should behave under such treatment.

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It is most probable that the Apostle took little notice of what these people said of him, or of their behaviour towards him; that he was not moved with their censure, but shook it off as he did the viper, and that he regarded as little afterwards their second sudden change, in their extravagant applause; for his thoughts were taken up with greater objects, and his soul more nobly employed; either raised up to heaven, by a lively faith and dependance upon his God; or else contriving which way to discharge best, the great trust that was reposed in him, in the conversion of the Gentiles. So should every good man behave in like circumstances. If slander and detraction should beset him, let him not wholly and immediately despise it: the worst of men pretend to do so: but let him search into his conscience impartially, call himself to a strict examination by the law of God; and if he find himself guilty in any respect, let him repent immediately: but, if nothing rise up against him there, if nothing be found amiss within, no matter what the whole world says. Let it be written in every heart, and engraven deeply in every memory, that “it is not
“ by

“by what others say of us, but by our
“own actions, that we shall be judged at
“the last day.”

This would give a good man courage and constancy to support calumny and slander; and while he rejoices in the absolution, and applause of a good conscience, and contemns scandal as much as he would do flattery, make him march on boldly and steadily in his duty. Such men indeed, are guarded by a watchful Providence; the wicked may approach, but not approach to hurt them; the viper may reach their hand, yet not be permitted to fasten there, but may be “shaken off immediately into the fire.”

But let not this be any comfort to those who are conscious that they are really vicious. Let not such men, when they suffer under evil report, or are censured justly for their crimes; think to come off by saying gravely, that they thank God they have a good conscience, and therefore care not what the world says. Alas! how easily are such people discovered, if but a little observed: they have the audaciousness of stubborn guilt, rather than the easiness of secure innocence; sometimes they are complaining and clearing
of

of themselves to those who are not concerned, or who know little of the matter, and wondering how people can be so uncharitable; sometimes again they are in the greatest rage, despising and threatening all the world; but always pleased with the dullest flattery. Yet, suppose that such persons could impose upon the world: can they ever escape the knowledge of God? Can they ever avoid the reproaches of those consciences which they appeal to? Will not these suggest to them, that it is not scandal but justice that they suffer under; and therefore that it is not constancy, but impudence to despise it? Will not these upbraid them with their dissembling with God and man, by their falshood and hypocrisy; and haunt them still in their solitudes and retirements, though they carry it off so confidently in public?

Whereas the honest upright man, is always settled and composed; however ill used he is abroad, his suffering innocence and injured honour, will afford him comfort at home. Though he be ruined in his fortune, and deserted by his friends, he may always safely retire to his good conscience, and always boldly

appeal to his God. And without question, this evenness of temper, is one of the best ways to lessen, if not to conquer this evil. A virtuous and good man unmoved by scandal and defamation, calm and serene in the midst of obloquy and reproach ; is compared by an anti-ent philosopher to a smooth and transparent stream, which, however, disturbed for a time, retains still the purity of its source, and clears itself by flowing on. And so indeed it happens very often : when justice and integrity, are the fountains of all our actions, a steady course of virtue will recover a sullied reputation.

In a word, as every good and honest man would abhor being guilty himself of flattery or detraction ; so if he happens to be attacked by either, let him collect himself within his own virtue, and repel the vain attempt with generous disdain. And particularly, as to unjust defamation ; if he suffers this for the sake of his religion and integrity, let him remember, that it ought to be the occasion of joy, rather than trouble to him : that this is no new thing, but what has happened to
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the best of men, and what may turn out unspeakably to his advantage. Let him hold fast his integrity a little longer, and death shall set him free from his enemies ; and the righteous God, the God of truth and justice, shall be his exceeding great reward.

We have our Saviour's own word for it, with which I shall conclude,—and let every good man apply it boldly to himself:—
“ Blessed are you, when men shall revile
“ you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake :
“ rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great
“ is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

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S E R M O N XIV.

SUBJECTION TO CIVIL AUTHORITY EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED.

TITUS iii. 1.

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities, and powers, to obey magistrates.

WHEN christianity, that pure and
“ peaceable wisdom which is
from above,” began, by the powerful
convictions of truth, and its own
N 3 intrin-

intrinsic worth and amiableness, to spread its conquests, and enlarge its dominions; all the engines of sophistry and human policy were set on work, all the weapons of calumny and slander were made use of to destroy and subvert it. Thus, in order to quicken the jealousy, and enflame the resentment of the then governing powers, it was artfully represented as an enemy to Cæsar; as an institution that exempted men from all the restraints of civil obedience, cancelled all the ties of duty and allegiance, consecrated strife and contention, tumults and seditions; and, in a word, as an institution that tended “exceedingly to trouble cities, and turn the world upside down.”

But that this was an accusation without any colour of truth, the deportment, as well as precepts of Him, who came down from heaven to publish this religion, does abundantly demonstrate. Though he was the “Son of God,” and consequently as such might have pleaded an exemption from all human laws and decrees, as being far above all earthly principalities and powers; yet as man he withheld not that obedience, which

which was justly due to all that were in authority. When tribute was demanded of him, though, as he himself saith, the "the children were free," yet, lest even in this point he should offend, he exerted his supernatural power, and was, if I may so speak, at the expence of a miracle to pay it.

And as by his behaviour he shewed the necessity of submission to the higher powers; he has also enjoined it by a solemn precept. For when the pharisees, willing to "intangle him in his talk," enquired of him whether it was lawful for the Jews, who were God's "peculiar people," and under his immediate care and cognizance, "to give tribute unto Cæsar," he, "perceiving their wickedness, said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? shew me the tribute-money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, render therefore unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God, the things which are God's."

It must be owned indeed, that the liberty of the gospel was by some mistaken,

and by others wilfully misinterpreted: and it is no improbable conjecture, that at the time of writing this epistle to Titus, there were some busy-bodies, some innovators in Crete, who asserted the "liberty, "wherewith Christ had made them free," to mean, not, what alone it does, an exemption from the slavery of sin, and all the burdensome ceremonies, and ritual observances of the Mosaical dispensation; but, what it was never designed to mean, an entire absolution from the restraints of government, and a criminal emancipation from the laws of man, and the obligations of society.

To wipe off so foul a reproach, so ungenerous an imputation cast upon christianity, the apostles, more particularly St. Paul, seem to have exerted themselves in pressing and enforcing the necessity of submission to all kinds of government, both civil and sacred, public and private. "Submit yourselves," says St. Peter, "to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well." In the
same

same manner does St. Paul exhort: "Let
" every soul be subject to the higher
" powers, for there is no power but of
" God: the powers that be, are ordained
" of God." Again, "children obey your
" parents in the Lord; for this is right."
And again, "servants obey in all things
" your masters according to the flesh;
" not with eye-service, as pleasing men,
" but in singleness of heart, fearing God."
And in the epistle to the Hebrews he pres-
ses them to "obey them that have the
" rule over them, and submit themselves;
" for they watch for their souls, as they
" that must give account; that they may
" do it with joy, and not with grief: for
" that is unprofitable for them." And
not to mention any more passages, he
cautions Titus in the words of the text,
to put the churches committed to his charge
"in mind to be subject to principalities,
and powers, to obey magistrates."

I am not ignorant to what an extrava-
gant height the duty of submission to the
civil authority has been carried. It has
been asserted (and the word of God itself
has been tortured to support the as-
sertion) that it is in no case lawful to re-
sist: that even when the essentials of our
constitution are endangered, when our li-

erties both civil and religious are violently infringed, our properties invaded, and all that is dear and valuable to us, forcibly wrested out of our possession; we are nevertheless, with a kind of stoical apathy, patiently to crouch under the iron rod of oppression; and to suffer the inroads of cruelty and tyranny, without advancing one step, or making the least effort to stop or controul them. Far be it from me to teach, or you to espouse such slavish doctrines; doctrines, I am sure, neither countenanced by the dictates of reason, nor warranted by revelation. It is certain there have been seasons, when opposition to merciless princes, and oppressive governors, was both expedient and lawful. It is to this public spirit that warmed and animated the breasts of our ancestors, that we are indebted for the preservation and security of our civil rights and properties: that we are here in the house of God, worshipping the God of our fathers in spirit and truth; and have the pleasing prospect before us, of transmitting these envied advantages, these invaluable blessings, safe and secure to our latest posterity.

But I would observe, that though it
may

may be lawful for subjects to unite in their mutual defence, when the very vitals of the constitution are openly attacked, and the whole of society is at stake: this will be no manner of plea for resistance, where the grievance is but small, and reaches but to a few individuals. When the rights of the governed in general are preserved and maintained; when justice is regularly and impartially distributed; and the laws are the measure and standard of the prince's actions; then, submission to the higher powers is always and invariably due.

Now subjection to principalities, and powers, implies in it a just consideration of the dignity of the person to whom the reigns of government are committed. It is true indeed, high and low, rich and poor, are all clothed with the same common nature, have the same passions and infirmities to struggle with; but still there is a dignity stamped upon the character of magistrates, which raises them above the common level. To eclipse the lustre of their characters, and derogate from their majesty, is in some sense to shake the very pillars and foundations of government: and to make authority ineffectual

for the purposes it was designed to answer. For without a just respect of, and reverence for the persons commanding, authority will be but a feeble thing at the best, but “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” And it is a common, and a too easy transition, from defaming the person, and lessening the dignity of the magistrate, to dispute his ordinances, and disclaim his power.

But further; It is implied in this duty of subjection to principalities and powers, that we ascribe and yield to them all that authority and power, which in justice, and of common right they are entitled to. What the peculiar prerogatives of the regal office are; what the distinguishing privileges entailed upon governors, and magistrates, must be determined by the particular laws and constitutions of different nations and communities. It is the peculiar felicity of Britons, that the power of the crown is circumscribed within certain limits and boundaries; that the law has said to it, “hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.” And while the balance is held even between the prerogative of the prince on the one hand, and the liberty of the subject on the other;

ther; there can be no plea for murmurs and discontents; no cause "of complaining in our streets."

If it be said that the welfare of the people is the supreme law, this is undoubtedly true; for all government was ordained of God for the good of the community: but it is at the same time as true, that there must be some prerogatives, some certain proportion of strength vested in the crown, even for the maintenance of liberty, and the happiness of society. For as in the natural body, when the proper supplies of blood and spirits are not communicated to the head, it cannot, as it ought, dispense life and energy to the subordinate members: so in the body politic, if the streams of authority are violently intercepted, and the legal appendages of royalty are ignominiously lopt and torn off; the people must in proportion want that necessary assistance and protection, which, before such lawless encroachments, they might justly expect and demand. And therefore, arrogantly to pull down "the mighty from their seats," to invade the rights, and to intrench upon the power of sovereigns, is in some measure to undermine
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the prosperity, and weaken the very liberties of the people: and they that are in this respect enemies to their prince, are at the same time enemies to their country also.

Again; Subjection to principalities and powers includes in it a candid interpretation of their actions and proceedings. This is indeed no more than what the eternal law of reason and equity requires of us, that "we do to others, as we "would they should do to us." This is likewise what true christian charity teacheth; for "charity" as the Apostle speaks, "thinketh no evil." It is the known and wicked artifice of the factious, and ungovernable, to work upon the weak passions of the vulgar, by malicious reports, and imaginary fears; and by making lies their refuge, to blow up the coals of contention into a flame; that amidst the dust of captious dispute, the clashing of different interests, and the tumults of head-strong multitudes, they may have room to gratify their inordinate ambition, avarice, or revenge. This may and ought to be a continual remembrancer to us all, neither hastily to give credit to every idle rumour and suggestion ourselves,

selves, nor industriously to propagate them amongst others without sufficient warrant and authority. Do we move in a private sphere? we ought to consider that the springs that set the wheels of government in motion are not easily discerned; and that therefore to censure the measures, and arraign at random the administration of our governors, is to condemn without knowledge, and to pronounce a definitive sentence upon their actions, without being able to examine the motives to, or the circumstances of them. We ought likewise to consider on the contrary, that it can never be the interest of those, who steer the helm of government, to undermine that foundation on which they stand; or to subvert that constitution, to which alone they owe the quiet enjoyment of all their civil and religious rights: at least it will become us to suspend the sentence of condemnation, till they are weighed in the balance of justice and equity, and are found wanting; and the facts are so clear and evident, that they cannot be disguised or hid. Instead therefore of suffering the malice of our hearts to infuse the venom of the bitterest words into our tongues; instead of spread-

spreading dishonourable reflections on, and cherishing suspicions of our governors, let us, as the Apostle advises, “study to be quiet, and to do our own business;” and by so doing fulfil the injunction of my text, of being “subject to principalities and powers.”

As for those whom Providence has distinguished, from their brethren, by nobleness of birth, and eminence of station; so far should they be from countenancing that unmanly and unchristian practice of reviling, and aspersing magistrates, or raising peevish and unreasonable exceptions against their administration: that it should rather be their care, as it will be their glory, “to move upon the face of these troubled waters;” to calm the swellings of discontent and faction. For as they have a nearer insight into the œconomy of government than others of low degree, they cannot but be sensible of the numberless perplexities and difficulties with which the regal office is surrounded and embarrassed. They cannot but know, that let the measures of an administration be ever so wisely concerted, some accidental difficulties may, and do often intervene, which the most consum-

consummate prudence could not possibly foresee ; nor perhaps the utmost efforts of labour and industry overcome : that the best-digested form of government is not absolutely free from inconveniences ; and that an attempt to remedy one, may, and has often proved an introduction to more and greater. They cannot but know further, that if the schemes of government prove abortive, this is not immediately to be imputed to the contrivers of them. Success is in the disposal of God alone : and he bestows it where, and in what manner he pleases. And accordingly, to create in men a just sense of his over-ruling Providence, he often gives it to the most weak and unpromising enterprises ; and sometimes he denies it to the most prudent and sagacious. So true is that observation, of the wise-man, “ that the race is not to the “ swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor “ bread to the wise, nor favour to men of “ skill ; but that time and chance,” directed by the wise Providence of God, “ happens to them all.” And therefore they who know these things will “ set a “ watch before the door of their lips, “ lest they offend with their tongues ;” they will

will neither indulge themselves in "speaking evil of dignities," nor permit it, as far as their influence will reach, to be done by others.

Further; Subjection to principalities and powers includes in it a chearful obedience to all their lawful commands. I say lawful, for where the injunctions of the prince contradict the laws of God, there we are sure, we ought "to obey God rather than man." But where this is not the case; where the ordinances of man, and the laws of society are founded on, and are, if I may so speak, enforcements of the laws of God; there to cavil and dispute, rather than to obey, is a crime not only against the state, but against God also. Under this head may be ranked an obedience to those laws, which forbid all rapine and violence, all extortion and oppression, all fraud and perjury, and whatever else tends to the hurt and prejudice of our neighbour, either in his person, property, or reputation. Under this branch of subjection to magistrates is included likewise a ready acquiescence in, and a chearful contribution to those taxes and imposts, which the wisdom of the legislature has thought expedient

expedient to demand; and which are only demanded of us as they are the necessary supports of every administration; and the very nerves and sinews of all government. This is in the proper sense of the words to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's;" or, as the Apostle exhorts, not only to "render honour to whom honour is due," but "tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom."

I cannot close this head without observing, that the best way of shewing our obedience to the civil powers is, in our respective stations and capacities, to co-operate with the king, and those that are commissioned by him, in the suppressing and exterminating vice and immorality; and in the regular and impartial execution of justice. It is indeed the duty of all, as far as they have opportunity and ability, not only to be active in maintaining their own peculiar rights and properties, but also in helping them to right that suffer wrong, in defending the poor, and such as are oppressed. The ministers of the gospel especially are bound, by the nature of their calling, and the many solemn engagements they are under, to oppose the works of darkness;
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and to stop the overflowings of iniquity, by all the means they are able to use. They are not only to "preach the word," but to "be instant in season, out of season, to reprove, rebuke, exhort with "all long-suffering, and doctrine." But forasmuch as these spiritual weapons make little or no impressions upon the profligate and licentious; as there are many crimes, that either escape the knowledge of the pastor, or are beyond his correction; the christian magistrate must bear a part in this "work and labour of love:" that such as will not be influenced by the terrors of the Lord, may at least be over-awed by the dread of temporal punishment.

To the practice of this duty of subjection to civil authority, we are obliged both by interest and duty.

First, we are obliged in point of interest "to be subject to principalities, and powers, to obey magistrates." In proof of this assertion, we need only consider, how melancholy the condition of mankind has in fact been, and how deplorable it would again be, were the fences of government broken down, and the obligations of law superseded. It was the
opinion

opinion of that great orator, and philosopher Cicero, that “without government
 “neither house, nor city, nor nation, nor
 “mankind, nor nature, nor the world
 “itself could subsist.” In a state of nature every man like “Ishmael is a wild
 “man; his hand will be against every
 “man, and every man’s hand against
 “him.” The wild beasts of anarchy, and confusion, would devour far and near; and the world itself would be but a confused scene of cruelty and injustice, murder, rapine, and oppression, and the utmost extravagances of wickedness. Since notwithstanding the penalties of laws, and all the terrors of the civil power, there is still so much violence and dishonesty, so much treachery and iniquity in the world; we may easily conceive what havoc, what devastation would ensue, were there nothing to restrain the fury of headstrong passions; and controul the petulance of undisciplined nature. For, to use the elegant expressions of the prophet Jeremiah: “If thou hast run with foot-
 “men, and they have wearied thee, then
 “how canst thou contend against horses?
 “And if in the land of peace wherein
 “thou trustedst, they have wearied thee,
 “then

“then how wilt thou do in the swelling
“of Jordan.”

And if the benefits resulting from government in general are a strong motive to submission to those, from whom these benefits are derived; we certainly have the highest obligations to this duty, who live under a government the best modelled, and every way adapted to our situation: a government, the benefits of which like “the dew of Hermon” descend “from the head, even to the skirts of his clothing:” where every man may sit down quietly “under his own vine, and “under his own fig-tree,” and none shall make him afraid: where the influence of wise and wholesome laws are diffused not only upon the rich, and powerful, but reach likewise to the sons and daughters of affliction, to the poor and indigent; to those that lie by the wall, and go by the highway side: a government where justice and mercy go hand in hand, and “judgment runs down as a mighty “stream;” where the law is open to the lowest subject, and the highest are not exempted from its cognisance: and what ought still to endear it the more to us, a government, that treats us like men, like
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creatures endued with reason, and understanding; that at the same time that it protects the church by law established, permits men calmly to differ, and conscientiously to dissent from it: under which every man is at liberty to pursue the dictates of his own private judgment in all things, which are not immediately detrimental to, or in their consequences destructive of the welfare of the state.

In the last place; The obligations of duty are united with those of interest to bind us to a peaceable submission to those in public stations. For as the Apostle speaks, "We must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." Not only from political views, and prudential considerations, or through fear of the civil sword; but out of a principle of religion, and a dread of offending that Power, by whom "kings reign, and princes decree justice." For though, through the different complexions and humours of men, government has been branched out into numberless shapes and appearances, it is certain that in general it is the institution and appointment of God. Agreeably to which, St. Paul informs us, that rulers are the ministers of God. .

Since then submission to those that are

in authority is not only a political, but a religious duty; not only bound upon us by human constitutions, but the express commands of God; let us shew our sense of the blessings we enjoy, by zealous and hearty endeavours to perpetuate the enjoyment of them; by offering up our "prayers and supplications for all men; more especially for the king, and all in authority;" and by contributing with chearfulness and alacrity to the support of government; that even our enemies, when they shall see our inviolable integrity, and perfect unanimity, may be constrained to say, Truly "this is a wise and an understanding people."

S E R M O N XV.

A CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
THE REWARD OF CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE.

2 TIMOTHY IV. 7, 8.

*I have fought a good fight, I have finished
— my course, I have kept the faith. Hence-
forth there is laid up for me a crown of
righteousness, which the Lord, the right-
eous Judge, shall give me at that day:
And not to me only, but unto all them
also that love his appearing.*

THIS is generally thought to be the
last epistle that St. Paul wrote
when he was in prison at Rome, the de-
fined victim of Nero, or his Lieutenant's
cruelty.

cruelty. It contains the noblest incentives to Timothy, to improve his gifts and talents, and directions how to behave under the various occurrences of life; particularly, the opposition and persecution he might expect from several sorts of men.

In this last chapter St. Paul charges him, in the most solemn manner, to prove himself a faithful Evangelist. And that he might inspire him with the greater resolution and fortitude, he, by a very natural and beautiful transition, gives him occasion to review the history of his own life and conduct, that he might be inflamed with a strong desire of imitating so bright a character; especially as St. Paul's expectations and prospects were infinitely greater than the sufferings of his past life. And this he does with the most affectionate sincerity, in the spirit of a departing father, solicitous for the honour and felicity of his beloved son.

“ For I am ready to be offered up, and
“ the time of my departure is at hand.
“ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.
“ Henceforth there is laid up for me a
“ crown of righteousness, which the Lord,
“ the

“ the righteous Judge, shall give me at
“ that day: and not to me only, but
“ unto all them also that love his ap-
“ pearing.”

It is common with this author to use terms of art to express his thoughts, and illustrate his subject; and here he uses military terms, or rather such as alluded to the olympic games, wherein the combatants who excelled in strength, dexterity, or swiftness, were honoured with a crown, the reward of their merit, and ensign of their victory. It is in allusion to this custom, that he calls his reward “ a crown of righteousness.”

“ I have fought a good fight.” If ever any person could say so, St. Paul was the man: for never was any man engaged in a better and more honourable cause; never did any man defend it in a more heroic and laudable manner. No man ever discovered greater intrepidity, or greater patience. Of this his conduct before the Jewish sanhedrim and Roman governors, and the travels and persecutions he underwent, are manifest instances. He had a liberal education, was a great proficient in Greek and Roman literature,

and was perfectly instructed in the christian scheme; and he acquitted himself with a becoming zeal, and true magnanimity in defence of the christian religion. He was not ashamed to vindicate the cause of Christ, the cause of truth, virtue, and liberty, even at Rome, the metropolis and mistress of the world; where human learning was in the highest perfection; where majesty appeared in all its grandeur and terror; and where all things moved according to Cæsar's absolute will. And as he was endued with abilities and resolution to assert it, he esteemed it his greatest dignity and glory to suffer for it.

What force must the precepts of this excellent Apostle receive from his own bright example! For the review of his past life filled his mind with raptures of holy joy. He had maintained a conflict against the most powerful opposition, with the greatest firmness, integrity, and fortitude. The cause in which he was embarked, he defended in a manner worthy the dignity of human nature; and was not to be moved from what was just and right, by the favour or displeasure of men of corrupt minds. The
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consciousness of his inflexible attachment to the interests of religion and virtue, and his vigorous efforts to promote them, at the hazard of his own happiness, liberty, and life, was a ground of the highest satisfaction, and enabled him to say with the greatest propriety, "I have fought a good fight."

"I have finished my course." He means the terms of his conflict; alluding still to the olympic games, one of which was the race. I have encountered my antagonists, maintained the dispute, and finished my course, and am entitled to the victor's reward. This is a manner of expression which St. Paul often uses, to represent the difficulties to which the love of truth, and the practice of virtue may expose us: thus, "Know ye not that they who run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize; so run that ye may obtain." He says, "I went up to Jerusalem by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the gentiles, but privately to them who were of reputation, least, by any means, I should run, or had run in vain." And, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before

“us.” So that by “finishing his course,” St. Paul means his active, steady, and indefatigable pursuit of truth, virtue, and piety, or perseverance in the ways of religion. His regard to the honour of God, and the good of mankind, made him surmount every danger and opposition: his sense of gratitude to the Saviour of mankind, inspired him with invincible courage, to combat the passions and prejudices of various sorts of persons, that would have prevented his spreading the knowledge of christianity in the world. His principles were rational and just, and no consideration whatever could divert him from the pursuit of what was right, or make him betray or give up the cause of christianity. “He stood fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free, and would not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage;” though attacked by the artifice, malice, and united persecuting powers of Jerusalem and Rome. And his unwearied endeavours to give men just apprehensions of the extent and nature of the Messiah’s kingdom, consisting in real piety and virtue, and to urge them to a suitable practice, which were the ends of his being called

called to be an Apostle, gave him a rational pleasure at the close of his days :
 “ I have finished my course.”

The last expression, by which St. Paul describes his conduct, is keeping the faith : “ I have kept the faith.” I have faithfully discharged the trust committed to me, and shewn the utmost fidelity in my warfare ; I have neither through cowardice, treachery, or corruption, or any motive whatsoever, transgressed the rules of my commission, betrayed or given up my Master’s interest, or acted a dishonourable part. It is a distinguishing excellence in St. Paul’s character, that he was always steady and faithful in maintaining and promoting the honour and interest of Christ’s kingdom, and the just and natural rights of his subjects. “ We preach not ourselves,” says he, “ but
 “ Christ Jesus the Lord ; and ourselves
 “ your servants for Jesus sake : we are
 “ not as many, who corrupt the word
 “ of God, but as of sincerity, but as of
 “ God, in the sight of God speak we in
 “ Christ.” He was indeed represented by his adversaries, the false apostles and craftsmen of the world, who were swayed by a desire of power and domination over

the liberties and consciences of men, in the most odious and unpopular light; but the sense of his own fidelity supported him under the most inhuman treatment. "We are troubled," says he, "on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. For which cause we faint not. For our light affliction, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." He had a firm persuasion of the truth, excellence, and usefulness of christianity, which rendered him incapable of sacrificing his sentiments to any temporal views or expectations; or of complying with the corrupt taste of the times, in prejudice of so good a cause: and he verified the truth of his own words, "Whosoever will live godly, must suffer persecution." In a word, he vigorously and faithfully improved his talents, and executed his commission to the honour of God, and the good of mankind. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

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As he had described his conduct in metaphorical terms, he very beautifully preserves the same stile, in representing his reward. The victors at the olympic games, and in war among the Greeks and Romans, were entitled to, and honoured with a crown. Now, says St. Paul, as I have acted a worthy and laudable part, in fighting a good fight, finishing my course, and being faithful to the confidence reposed in me, I shall be dignified and distinguished with a crown of infinitely greater value than any that this world can confer: "I have not run in vain, neither have I laboured and been faithful in vain;" for I shall be rewarded with a crown of righteousness. This is an expression that often signifies the future reward of the faithful servants of God; and with great justness and propriety, since a crown is the highest mark of honour and distinction among men. It implies all that glory and happiness which St. Paul expected in the other world, and imports the same with eternal life. Thus St. James, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for being approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

And, "When the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory, that fadeth not away." And, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." It is called "a crown of righteousness" because it is a just reward, or as it is the reward of righteousness, or a course of religion and virtue. The prospect of this reward filled the mind of the Apostle with unspeakable satisfaction; and in the language of triumphant hope, he adds, "which the Lord shall give me at that day; and to all them that love his appearing."

By the "Lord, the righteous Judge," St. Paul means Jesus Christ: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son, who is ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and the dead."

By "that day," he undoubtedly means the day of judgment and retribution; "when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth." St. Paul uses the expression in this sense: "I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him unto that day." "The time is coming"

“ing that the dead shall be judged; and
 “that the Lord will give rewards to
 “thy servants the prophets, and to the
 “saints.” “When Christ who is our
 “life shall appear, then shall we also ap-
 “pear with him in glory.” Then shall
 every faithful servant of God, receive a
 crown of glory and immortality; “when
 “Jesus shall judge the quick and the
 “dead at his appearing, and his king-
 “dom.” The love of truth, and the
 practice of virtue, will entitle them to a
 crown of righteousness; and they shall
 shine as the brightness of the firmament,
 and as the stars of heaven, for ever and
 ever.

From the words thus explained we may
 observe, in the first place, the great advan-
 tage of having just sentiments of religion
 and virtue; and the great wisdom of an
 inflexible attachment to them.

What sublime and rational pleasures
 must spring from a consciousness of ha-
 ving acted according to truth and duty.
 When no temptations of any kind have
 diverted a man from pursuing the most
 excellent and valuable objects with inte-
 grity and fortitude; when death, the
 great terror of human nature, is ready
 to put a period to his days, the objects

of his hope and pursuit magnify and discover new excellencies; his future rewards become more bright and attractive; his reflections and his prospects support his spirits. He is delighted with his wise choice, in espousing and asserting the cause of virtue. He is happy in reflecting that he has finished his course with fidelity, and that he is passing to a scene of endless peace and joy, where he will have no more adversaries and dangers to encounter; where there will be no more treachery, envy, or malice; no more pain, persecution, or death: in a word, where there will be no more misery, but virtue and pleasure will be inseparable. Who then would neglect a course of life, attended with such invaluable advantages? Who would not be ambitious of a character that refines and dignifies human nature, because it is rational and godlike, and that will enable a man in his last moments to adopt the triumphant language of the text. Whosoever loves truth, practises virtue in sincerity, and maintains his principles with christian fortitude, deserves this character; and may say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished

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“ ed my course, I have kept the faith:
“ henceforth there is laid up for me a
“ crown of righteousness, which the Lord
“ the righteous judge will give me at that
“ day, when the quick and the dead shall
“ stand before his tribunal.” Then shall
the friends of truth, virtue, and religion,
meet again, and dwell for ever, in the
presence of God, when time shall be
no more.

Secondly; We cannot but observe the
superior excellency of the christian religion,
with respect to the clearness of its discoveries,
the greatness of its rewards, the eminent examples
of virtue it exhibits, and the consolations it affords.
It has brought immortal life to light; it has
cleared away idolatry and superstition, and ascertained
“ eternal life in heaven” to every sincere lover
of truth and virtue. It proposes to our imitation
the most amiable and shining instances of benevolence
and fortitude, honour and usefulness: it supports us
in adverse circumstances, by giving us just apprehensions
of the perfections and Providence of the supreme Being,
and a full assurance of glory and immortality. It
enjoins nothing to be believed, but what is rational
and worthy of God; nothing
to

to be practised, but what is true, venerable, just, pure, lovely, laudable, and virtuous. In a word, christianity addresses our hopes and fears in the most effectual manner, assuring us that the rewards and punishments of a future state, will be respectively proportioned to the characters of men in the present world; and only requires integrity and perseverance in order to our obtaining the happiness of heaven. Since therefore we are favoured with so excellent a dispensation, animated by such attractive prospects, and guided by such bright examples, particularly those of our Saviour and his Apostles; since we are embarked in the noblest cause, and have a crown of life to win or lose: "Let us
 "run with patience the race that is set
 "before us," aspiring after the temper and character which will prepare us for heaven, and sacrificing every view to the hope of a glorious immortality: "Let us
 "fight the good fight of faith, and lay
 "hold on eternal life, which God that
 "cannot lie hath promised."

30 JA 69

The END of VOL. V.